

The Undying Love of Abraham Lincoln and Ann Rutledge

Adam J Kugler

March 17, 2024

I first heard of the relationship between Abraham Lincoln and Ann Rutledge as a child. At first it seemed as if it were a mythical relationship. It was like there was little said by anyone about the relationship. No matter what history I read, there was no one that wanted to take on the facts of the case, not for the case of history. It is this that has spurred me to write the following. I believe that the case is stronger than ever that this was the first romantic relationship that Abraham Lincoln experienced. Maybe it is because in a way my life parallels this story that I feel it is important. In a period of formative years in Lincoln's life, he makes the move from Indiana to the rolling hills along the Sangamon River to a village that is called New Salem. It was while he was in his early twenties that he lived in New Salem. It was here that he would begin his earnest studies, and would go on to take the bar exam. It was also here that Abe would serve in the Illinois State Legislature. This was something that he enjoyed, as politics seemed to be a strong suit for Lincoln. It is also here that he struggles to find his identity, like so many young people, so why does the idea of his first love seem so out of character for Lincoln? I think that it is because we look at history with a forward glance, in other words we look at it with the idea that we already see some of the things that are coming, especially for a figure who is such a public person, such as Lincoln. We have this idea that we know all that there is to know about Lincoln, and so we dismiss the little details, and forget the life that he was living.

He, Lincoln, did not know that he was going to go on to marry Mary Todd. This was not in his ability, he was not a psychic individual, but rather he was a human being, and to fall in love at the age of 25 was not out of keeping with the life that they would have lived at that time. In fact, in many ways it might have been a little old to be falling in love, but that is not the point, the point is that it just takes a stroll through the village of New Salem, talking to the people who

help to bring life to the village today, that we learn about the story of Abe and Ann Rutledge in the first place. This love affair, it is something of a fairy tale for us today, it will help us to see that Lincoln is human, like so many others, and that I think is what frightens most historians. We would rather see Lincoln as a mythical being, rather than the human that he really was. It was there in that village that Lincoln would have first met Ann, and perhaps she had been there, on the banks of the river the first time that he had taken a load of goods to New Orleans. Maybe it was while he was working hard to get his flat bottom raft over the dam, that he first got a glimpse of Ann, we don't really know what first caught his eye, but it was something that caught his attention at some point in time. It was clear that in those first few glimpses of Ann, she was not the object of his affection, not until about 1834 did this happen. Even then the relationship was a little on the quiet side, because Ann was engaged. She had become engaged to one McNamar who was going by the name McNeil. He had left to go east to get his family, and disappeared for 3 years. No one really knows what the hold up was in getting his family and bringing them west, but there was something there that held them up. It was during this absence that Lincoln and Ann began to court one another.

At first Lincoln would accompany Ann on her evening walks. This seems to be the common thought. He just grew closer and closer to Ann as they continued to do things together. But that is the thing, very few historians want to venture a guess as to what really occurred, and I will offer no guesses either. No, I am going to simply present the facts, and let those who want offer their own guess as to what happened. Any information that we have, if any at all, are in the eye witness accounts that were left behind, the same eye witnesses that William H. Herndon, Lincoln's future law partner, would interview. However, Herndon was not the only one to

interview some of these people, it might be interesting to note, that a scholar in history and preservation would be another person to interview some of these voices, that was Thomas Reep. It would be hard to get anywhere without the interviews that these two men had. Many of them are quite clear that there was no doubt a relationship between Abe and Ann. So why is the relationship so controversial, and why do we not have more to say about the relationship? Those are a couple of the questions that will be answered in this text. It is important that we do not jump to conclusions about what actually took place in New Salem in 1834-35. Those months were crucial to the man who would go on to lead the United States. It is important in many ways, but one of the most, it is clear that the loss of Ann ripped off the bandaid that had been in place since Lincoln had lost his mother and sister. Losses that he had never quite fully dealt with, but that is a study for another time. The loss of Ann was also a stepping stone in the direction of us being able to understand the melancholy that Lincoln felt toward life in general.

Lincoln's melancholy was first really introduced in the little video at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, in Springfield, Illinois, "Lincoln's Eyes." This was where the concept first started gaining traction, but there was something behind that melancholy. Sure, we knew that tragedy seemed to surround Lincoln, and that never seemed to really go away. Instead, there was a lack of understanding, and maybe it is with the term melancholy in the first place. Essentially, for the purpose of this, we will use sadness to kind of go with the term melancholy. In the end we must understand that melancholy is almost a deep depression. It was something that Lincoln himself was keenly aware of, and we cannot ignore something that Lincoln knew of himself.

The year was 1866, and it was late in the year. Lincoln's law partner, William H. Herndon, had been giving lecture after lecture about President Lincoln. It was here that Herndon decided that he needed something big, in order to keep the people coming back to the lectures that were about Lincoln. It was the lecture of November 16, 1866 that Herndon decided that he was going to talk about Lincoln's life in New Salem.¹ It was not the first time that Herndon had something to say about the life of the former President of the United States. No, this was another lecture, and there were progressively fewer and fewer people coming to the lectures, so Herndon made the promise that he would reveal something special about Honest Abe. It was something that Herndon had been holding back, something that would blow the minds of the people who happened to be in the audience that night. One of the people who thought that Herndon was just making this story up, off the top of his head was none other than Mary Todd Lincoln. She had been convinced that Lincoln had loved her, and only her. The title of this lecture was finally proposed and it was: "*Abraham Lincoln, Miss Ann Rutledge, New Salem, Pioneering, and the Poem.*"² The common conversation was more than likely along the lines of who is this Ann Rutledge? Would the lecture title be enough to get the attention of the public? It probably would have been enough, but there was a good chance that Herndon embellished a little on the subject, but in the end there is enough evidence to prove that this was indeed something that happened.

Herndon had to square off against the will of Mary Todd, however, because she was convinced that Lincoln's only lover, was her, Mary Todd. According to Mary Todd, she had been told by Lincoln that she had been his only love. Herndon, on the other hand might have thought

¹ Harry Rosecrans Burke, *Lincoln and Ann Rutledge and the Pioneers of New Salem*. (Herrin, IL: Trovillion Private Press, 1945); V.

² *Ibid.*

that the topic of Ann Rutledge and the love that Lincoln had for her, was a good jumping off point for the “biography he proposed.”³

By the end of 1865, Herndon believed that Lincoln had loved Ann, but he had no evidence of it, so he set out in search of evidence, and that took him to New Salem. Now Herndon claims that he was not a stranger to New Salem, nor was he a stranger to the Rutledge family. He also claims that he “knew Ann personally.”⁴ Whether this was indeed a fact, or not, it was not hard to believe that Herndon had known people in New Salem. In fact he is a cousin to one of the residents of the village, but there is not enough evidence to support whether or not William Henry Herndon did in fact know Ann. However, as Walsh says, Herndon, in his interviewing people from the village and hearing the stories about Ann, never actually admits to them that he knew Ann.⁵ So the question that we must ask ourselves at this time, is not whether or not all of Herndon’s story is true, but what parts of the story are real? There is no doubt about the story being real, you do not have twenty plus people who are witnesses to the relationship between Lincoln and Ann, and it be something that is not true, but rather, it is something that we need to look closer at. The evidence is there, but what does that evidence tell us?

To look at the evidence is the only solution to the problem. It is not possible to evaluate this story without looking at the evidence that is out there. How this topic continues to slip under the radar, well, there is probably good reason for, but we will not speculate on that at this moment in time. It is just important to evaluate the evidence as it was presented at the time. Was there a

³ Ibid.

⁴ John Evangelist Walsh. *The Shadows Rise: Abraham Lincoln and the Ann Rutledge Legend*. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 34.

⁵ Ibid, 54.

reason for the evidence to be pushed aside at the time, or were these people telling the truth? Was there some logic behind what they were saying, and was there more that needs to be looked at? It is quite clear that there are some who will say that the evidence is not there, but it is clear to all that the evidence has not been hidden from us all this time, but rather, it has been hiding right in plain sight. Herndon, a master lawyer, could have easily gotten these people talking, but that is not what he really wanted to do. No, he wanted them to talk about Lincoln in their own way. This is apparent in the way that he talks to them and interviews them. He didn't want to steer the conversation, but rather he wanted them to steer it, and take them through their experiences to what happened in the village of New Salem.

This process could possibly steer the talk that he was to give in November 16, 1866. There need be some guiding questions, but Herndon's search had been put in gear by the interview of certain members of the old New Salem community. Some of them were more forthcoming than others, and that was not a bad thing. At first there was no direct line of questions, it was all in search of the facts that Herndon could put down in a biography that he was going to write about Lincoln. His speeches were great, but who was better qualified to write Lincoln's biography? He had spent most of 1865, after Lincoln's death, searching for information, anything that could be told to the public. It had come even to the detriment of the law office that he was still supposed to be running.⁶ He was struggling to keep his focus clear, but in 1869, with worsening financial issues, Herndon agrees to sell the "Lincoln Record," and for the moment gives up on being able to write the biography that he had dreamed of writing.⁷

⁶ Ibid,

⁷ Ibid, 25.

He opts to sell the record to someone that he feels can do the writing that he has not been able to get done, but at the same time, he lets go of all of the records that talk about the Rutledge Legend.⁸ Was this the end for Herndon, and for anyone who wanted to know more about the love of Lincoln's life in New Salem, the one in whose grave Lincoln's heart was supposedly buried? It might have been if that was all there was, but Herndon would grow to regret letting go of all that information, and it would not be the end of his chance to write the biography, not once the young and well spoken Jesse Weik shows up in Springfield. With a chance to take up the sword again, Herndon goes immediately back to work to get the biography that he has dreamed of, written. All of this took place in the 1880s, and in 1889 the product of Weik and Herndon came to a favorable ending.⁹

It was the evidence that Herndon had sold that was now in the hot seat, because there were people who were not professional historians who had gotten their hands on the story, but even with that, there was a good chance that it was going to be buried, and no one was going to want to use it, and that was after the historian Paul Angle got hold of it. He was the first professional historian to remark on the legend, and his take was not a favorable one, for those who were fans of the love story.¹⁰ Angle was not a huge fan of the legend, and he was willing to put his reputation on the line to prove that it was nothing more than a hoax that was being perpetrated on the public, but by this time, the man who had gathered the evidence was dead, and had been for some time. Herndon had not lived to see the first historic treatment of Lincoln, or of the Lincoln Rutledge relationship. Angle also brought a stop to a hoax that he believed was a part of the story

⁸ Ibid, 26.

⁹ Ibid, 33.

¹⁰ Ibid, 51.

as well, and that was that there were letters that had been carefully scrutinized by the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1928, that had been supposedly examined by three people, and verified of their authenticity. However Angle said that none of those three were professional historians, and that these letters—letters that were supposedly between Lincoln and Ann Rutledge were not real letters.¹¹ So, casting aside these letters, what was the evidence that Herndon had gathered? It was a series of interviews with people who lived in New Salem. It was a series of letters written to these people—people who lived beside Ann and Abe. This was the thing, there was a lot of information, but that was the thing, no one had been able to get their hands on it, and review it.¹²

Douglas L. Wilson gives us our best look at the evidence as it is handed to us. Looking at the information that was given to Herndon, from his informants, is quite clearly a source of its own. Maybe there were some who should have been more cautious in what they said, and maybe they actually knew what they had to say, but as Wilson says in regards to the evidence as given by a George Spears, perhaps we should take it as “refreshing candor,” this was something that was said by historian J.G. Randall, and he says it because he believes that the others lack the ability to exercise this “candor.”¹³ Should we take the candor of one and say that others were not exercising candor, or was it just the fact that not many people had gotten the chance to see and weigh the evidence for themselves? It is possible that the people of New Salem had truly seen the relationship between Ann and Abe, but we have to treat the evidence carefully. These are eye witness testimonies. That means that there is this chance that they are not being fully candid with

¹¹ Ibid, 51.

¹² Douglas L. Wilson. *Lincoln Before Washington: New Perspectives on the Illinois Years*, (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1997), 76-77.

¹³ Ibid, 78.

us, and might be following questions that were there to lead the respondents in a certain direction, but there is no evidence of that either.

As we look at historical evidence, eye witness accounts are generally taken as something that could very well have happened. Why then, in the case of Ann Rutledge and Abraham Lincoln do we look at the evidence with such caution? There are times when we take an eye witness account as fact, but that is not what is taking shape here with the evidence from the people from New Salem. It very well could be that there are those who take up the side that Mary Todd Lincoln took when she first heard the news, they don't want anything to tarnish the image of the "great man," but that is the thing, we have a less clear look at Lincoln.¹⁴ It was through Herndon that we find out that there was this love, this thing that tarnishes the image of a perfect god-like person that we want to turn Lincoln into. It is not that Herndon looked down on Lincoln, quite the opposite is the case, but rather he never truly got along with Mary Todd Lincoln. So was Herndon's story an attack on the marriage, or was there some sort of evidence of some love that took place? It is through Herndon's informants that we learn the truth about the affair of the heart. Without the work that Herndon did, we have no clue about the things that took place in the small village of New Salem.

While there is evidence that Lincoln indeed lived in New Salem, there were those who had something to gain from a relationship between Lincoln and Ann Rutledge. Was the Rutledge family in this to gain notoriety? It was possible. They did indeed have a stake in Lincoln's loving Ann. But there were other people in the village, people who knew Lincoln and Ann, what did they have to say about the relationship? As we look at the evidence there is enough there to draw

¹⁴ Ibid, 77.

the conclusion that there was some sort of connection between Lincoln and Ann. As we turn our attention to the claims both for and against this relationship, we need to remember that all the people were looking back on this from some distance. In other words there had been some passage of time, this might help to explain why there was such a fogginess to the remembrances.

We begin with one of the earliest interviews that Herndon had. It was with one Hardin Bale. It was an interview that was taken down in May, 1865. In this interview Herndon is searching for information about Lincoln, the things that he did, the things that he was a part of. At no time was Herndon's search for something on Ann Rutledge, but rather it is something that just pops up in the conversation that he gets from Hardin Bale. It is in short order that Hardin says: "He at this time fell in love with a Miss Ann Rutledge..."¹⁵ There is no prompt from Herndon, and there is no indication of whether he was familiar or unfamiliar with the story, but it is the first record that Herndon gets that tells us about Ann. Hardin goes on to say that she was "a pretty & much accomplished girl of Menard County, living in New Salem."¹⁶ This is a first glimpse of who this girl is, and there is nothing assumed about the girl. Herndon at the time does not even pursue any avenue of questions, but rather continues to record what happened with Lincoln at the time of her death. "It was said that after the death of Miss Rutledge & because of it, Lincoln was locked up by his friends — Saml Hill and others, to prevent derangement and suicide — so hard did he take her death."¹⁷

¹⁵ Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, "Hardin Bale to WHH (interview)" in *Herndon's Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements about Abraham Lincoln*. (Springfield, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 12-13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

It was here in this interview that we get the first glimpse of Ann. At the same time, we also get our first choice about whether or not we should believe the now recorded idea of whether or not Lincoln was in love with Ann. Hardin Bale had no reason to associate the two of them. We turn our attention to another person, someone who was attached to both Lincoln and Ann, this was none other than the wife of Hardin Bale, one Esther Summers Bale. Listen to the words that she says about Ann: “Knew Miss Rutledge well — had auburn hair — blue eyes — fair Complexion — slim — pretty — Kind — tender good hearted woman — height about 5 feet 3 in — weighed about 120 pounds — was beloved by all who Knew her.”¹⁸ This was someone who knew Ann quite well, so well in fact that she could give a good description of her, even after 30 years. But Misses Bale goes on to tell us a little bit about the story of Ann and Abe. “McNamar — Hill & Lincoln all Courted her near the same time — died as it were of grief — Miss Rutledge was beautiful.”¹⁹ We do not, at this interview get a good look at what happened to Lincoln after the death of Ann. But we do get a different piece of the puzzle, and that was that supposedly Ann died of grief. This is something that Herndon goes onto repeat, and it may have been the first time that he buys something wholesale. But these interviews, the one with Hardin and the one with Esther, are a year apart.

It is possible, by the time Herndon comes to interview Esther Summers Bale, that he was on the hunt for information about Ann Rutledge. He was still gathering other information, but this was all confirmation that Ann was indeed a part of the picture. Both husband and wife had backed up what the other had said. However, this was not the only place he was hearing this

¹⁸ Ibid, “Esther Summers Bale (WHH interview)”, 527.

¹⁹ Ibid.

from. He was also getting the word from another angle, someone whose interview is a little more controversial, but the question is, was there any way that this person could have known that Ann was a part of the picture, and how would he have come across this information? It is none other than Isaac Cogdal. While this was a controversial interview, it is important for a couple of reasons, first and foremost is that it is the first time we have record of someone pointedly asking Abraham Lincoln about his time in New Salem. This was something that was unprecedented. Why would Cogdal have even had any idea to ask Lincoln about this love affair? There is no record of the event other than what Isaac Cogdal tells to Herndon in his interview. To set the interview in place, Lincoln was preparing to leave Springfield, Illinois to take up residency in the White House as President of the United States. The evidence that says that Cogdal even knew to ask anything about the Rutledge affair, shows that more than likely he would have known the people involved. This is what Cogdal has to offer us:

“May I now in turn ask you one question Lincoln Said Cogdale Most assuredly. I will answer your question if a fair one with all my heart. then it was that he answered—as follows
Abe is it true that you fell in love with & courted Ann Rutledge’ said Cogdale Lincoln said, ‘it is true—true indeed I did. I have loved the name of Rutledge to this day. I have Kept my mind on their movements ever since & love them dearly’—said L.
Abe—Is it true—said Cogdale, that you ran a little wild about the matter:
I did really—I run off the track: it was my first. I loved the woman dearly & sacredly: she was a handsome girl—would have made a good loving wife...”²⁰

Here in just a few lines we have this twist in the story of the Lincoln-Rutledge romance. Is it possible that Isaac Cogdal did ask this question? Well, it is clear that, at the time that he was interviewed he had no hesitation in recalling this event, so in some way or form this took place.

²⁰ Ibid, “Isaac Cogdal (WHH interview), 441-442.

Just like in all the other cases, Isaac is not originally probed for a story about Ann Rutledge at all. This all of a sudden makes the case that he knew something of this matter.

As Douglas Wilson states in his book *Lincoln Before Washington: New Perspectives on the Illinois Years*, “Herndon’s reputation as an honest man—as, indeed, a man with a passion for the truth—has been affirmed in all quarters and is not in dispute.”²¹ If that is the case, why is it that all the opposition does is accuse Herndon of steering the conversations or interviews in order to get these statements? It is important to know that the history here is more political than it is factual. The history of Herndon’s quest was not a secret to Mary Todd Lincoln, but the problem was that at the time, when Herndon came out with the secret of Ann Rutledge and Abraham Lincoln’s romance, people thought that it was simply to attack Mary Todd Lincoln, someone that he did not have particular favor for. He and Mary Todd Lincoln had been at odds since before Lincoln had left Springfield for the White House. Perhaps the biggest thing that was coming between Herndon and his quest to tell the truth was that Mary Todd was not quite in the know of what her husband had gone through.

There was such a backlash in 1866 and 1867, following the speech delivered on November 16, 1866, that there was indeed thought to be some fault found in the words that Herndon was dealing with. Whether there is any reason to believe that Herndon had made the whole affair up well, that is completely understandable to an extent. There is a great need to evaluate some of the things that Herndon had to say in the speech, and how those things could be misconstrued, or even made up or embellished. However, not everything that was said was made up or embellished. In the telling of the story, Herndon implores us to believe, “I do not think—wishing

²¹ Douglas L. Wilson, *Lincoln Before Washington: New Perspectives from the Illinois Years*, 80.

to arrogate nothing to myself—that any living man or woman so well understands, the many delicate wheels and hidden springs of the story of Lincoln, Miss Rutledge, the Poem, and its relation to the two, in time and place, as I do.”²² This is an indication that he is not even going to tell us all that he knows, that there is a great deal that lies underneath the surface of this story. He even says that, to open up his lecture to the people of Springfield. He realizes that there is a great many people who could take the story and find fault with it, and perhaps he takes a little artistic license and embellishes the story, but did he do it intentionally, or did he follow the things that he had learned from the people he had interviewed? It is quite possible that Herndon only followed the things that he had been told, but that is the thing, we only have the pieces that were left behind, the little bits and pieces that were given to us from Herndon, and passed to future generations.

We turn our attention to the naysayers for a moment, before we take up looking at the legend any further. We have to realize that within a matter of a short period of time, Mary Todd knew what the lecture was about, and had disagreed with the press coverage of the story. It doesn't take much of a guess as to how quickly the press had picked up the story of this forlorn romance. Herndon had done his best to make sure that all the press was there and were answering the call to publish the lecture. This was fairly standard practice, but that is the thing, there are times when this can be a blessing and times when it could be a curse. By early in 1867 Mary Todd Lincoln had someone else who had taken up her cry of foul play. This was none other than the Lincoln's pastor. On March 6, 1867 the answer was there by Reverend James Smith. To put this in terms, Reverend James Smith had been the pastor who had married the Lincolns. This is a man who

²² William H. Herndon, *Lincoln And Ann Rutledge And The Pioneers of New Salem*, (Herrin, IL: Trovillion Private Press, 1945), 4.

claimed to know the two Abraham and Mary very well. In his refutation he says, “Several weeks ago I read in the *Dundee Advertiser* an article, which went the round of papers, both in America and this country, headed, ‘Curious Love Romance in the Life of Abraham Lincoln,’ which I was constrained to view as calculated to put a stigma on the character of the illustrious martyr...”²³ It was clear that Rev. Smith was not happy with the spin of things that was hitting the press at that moment. He was not happy that Herndon had even implied that there was such a romance in the life of Abraham Lincoln.

Much like many of the debates of the time, they took place in the newspaper. Herndon was left with a story, but he was not sure that there was anything else he could do. Up until the year before he passed away he had continued to try to get people to interview with him. He was not about to let this story drop. He was convinced that his story was the truth. But what kind of facts were there, other than the oral stories that were being given to Herndon, and what were they going to help? There were those who were anxious to put their mark on this story, but there were not many people of the community left by 1890. Many of the people who were left, were kids, and even babies when the said affair was taking place, and with that being said, they had very little that they could add, except for what they had overheard from their parents. Still, Herndon chose to pursue asking people about it. He was not going to give up, not if it meant that he was going to get to the bottom of this story.

One of the biggest things that naysayers had to say was an attack on the account given by Isaac Cogdal. This is something that we see in one of those early attacks on the legend. It says, “Naturally many have wished to make it appear that they were intimate with Mr. Lincoln, so in

²³ Rev. James Smith. “The Domestic Life of Abraham Lincoln,” in *The Chicago Tribune*, March 6, 1867, newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/465980089>.

their imaginary conversations which they repeat they disprove instead of prove by telling how they called him Abe and the like.”²⁴ This was just refutation against Isaac Cogdal. So many people were convinced that there was no one who would have considered calling Mr. Lincoln, “Abe” because that would not have been civilized, but that is the thing, we can see that Cogdal had this closeness with Lincoln that was not necessarily seen by anyone but those who were close friends with Lincoln. In fact the writer of this claims that Mr. Bunn went on to say, “Those who profess to have been familiar with Mr. Lincoln and speak of calling him ‘Abe’ are presuming ignorance. The people of Springfield knew him only as ‘Mr. Lincoln.’”²⁵ So how does this work, well, in the first place Isaac Cogdal was not familiar with Lincoln only from Springfield, but rather he had known him when he lived in New Salem. This might explain why he had familiarity with Lincoln as “Abe.”

In fact as we know it, Isaac answers for where he knew Lincoln. He was quick to tell how he knew Lincoln, and where from. “I Knew Abe Lincoln the first week he came to Salem in 1831— June or July. He Kept Store for Offutt in Salem in 1831 & 2.”²⁶ It appears at first that Cogdal would have fallen into a pit of vipers had he claimed that he only knew Lincoln by the name “Abe” but that is the thing, he tells us that he knew Abe Lincoln, and that there is a great chance that the town would have known Lincoln as Abe, as this is something that the people of Indiana and of New Salem both referred to knowing Lincoln as. So as we see, there is little hope of this explanation being solid. There were those who knew Lincoln in this light.

²⁴ John W. Bunn. “The Domestic Life of Abraham Lincoln” in *The Herald Statesman*, February 12, 1912, [newspapers.com](https://www.newspapers.com), <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-herald-statesman/143530073>.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Wilson & Davis, “Isaac Cogdal (WHH Interview),” 440.

The sad thing is, that there are few who actually refute the existence of the relationship, that is until we have the refutation of Paul M. Angle. He is the first to publicly come out and say that the relationship that we have with Ann and Abe is just not something that would have happened. We have to believe that the lack of refutation that the relationship did happen, means that everyone was willing to believe to some extent that it did happen. What we have instead is refutations of details of the relationship, and the reason is, that the story was so widely discussed that there was this problem of the author of the lecture, William H. Herndon, taking artistic license with it, but is there evidence that he did, there is no way to really know. The only things that we know, is that there is indeed a great deal of information to sift through, in order to get to the bottom of the stack of people who claim this relationship was either non-existent, or not as the lecturer said. However, the biographer Albert J. Beveridge said this in an article in *The Indianapolis Star*, “The attitude of the public, which seems to demand that the biographer distort the facts regarding a man’s private life in order that the subject may be ‘set up as a little tin god on wheels,’”²⁷ This was the continued war on Ann Rutledge and the story that said that Lincoln had an unhappy home life with Mary Todd. While we will not be working with the latter, the former is still significant.

It is clear that the historians were against the legend getting out. They were convinced that the Ann Rutledge Legend was enough to tarnish the look of Abraham Lincoln. They were convinced that he never would have done anything like falling in love with Ann. But what if we looked at his psychological condition. It is important to know that Lincoln suffered a great deal

²⁷ Albert J. Beveridge. “Public’s Aversion to Facts Problem For Biographers” in *The Indianapolis Star*, March 04, 1924, newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-indianapolis-star/143536570>.

at the loss of Ann Rutledge. Historian and Professor Charles B. Strozier makes quite a case for the issue of Lincoln and his “temporary derangement,” as the citizens of New Salem had said. “Lincoln was distraught over losing Ann Rutledge and, it seems pretty clear, became clinically depressed after her death, poised near suicide. The sheer number of his friends and neighbors who recalled how extreme his reaction to Ann’s death should be taken seriously.”²⁸ For the first time in nearly 160 years from the time of Lincoln’s death, someone had taken up the cause of what the New Salemites had seen in the neighbor at the time. Was it possible that all the other historians had missed something, the fact that these people had all seen the same thing? Professor Strozier goes on to say, “It is a telling detail in the report of Hardin Bale that Lincoln had to be ‘locked up by his friends’ so that he would not commit suicide.”²⁹

The fact that 17 friends and neighbors saw that Lincoln was grieving and only 7 had no opinion on the matter of whether Lincoln grieved at the death, that is a telling statistic that the depression and grief ran deep.³⁰ Going back to Albert Beverage’s comment about how we set up our icons, was it possible that this is what people wanted to do to Lincoln, was set him up as a “little tin god on wheels”? It was more than possible. The fight that people like Mary Todd Lincoln, Paul M. Angle and Reverend James Smith all bring to the forefront is that Lincoln would not have gone through such a thing. He would not have grieved because he was never engaged to this woman. Reverend James Smith goes as far to say: “Early in December last an article went the rounds of the papers in this country, purporting to be part of a lecture delivered

²⁸ Charles B. Strozier. *Your Friend Forever, A. Lincoln: The Enduring Friendship of Abraham Lincoln and Joshua Speed*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2016), 71.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Douglas Wilson. *Lincoln Before Washington: New Perspectives On The Illinois Years*, 82.

by you on Mr. Lincoln's life and past history, which I read with feelings of mingled indignation and sorrow, because, coming as it did from his intimate friend and law partner, it was calculated to do the character of that great man an incalculable injury..."³¹ However, this seems to be the whole argument that this side makes is that this would do injury to the character of Abraham Lincoln. It was not that Herndon was necessarily wrong, but that it would tarnish the "tin god on wheels" that everyone thought Lincoln to be. The Reverend Smith goes on to say that it was impossible for Lincoln to have said "That his heart, sad and broken, was buried there."³² It was impossible because he "assiduously and perseveringly sued for the hand, the heart, the love, and the devotion for life of a young lady who was much admired for her intelligence, her fine conversational powers, and capable of making herself very agreeable in any circle, and who could if so disposed, have wedded with the first of the land."³³

The end of the objections would not be heard. They wanted to make it clear that there was love in the relationship between Lincoln and Mary Todd. However, in making that case, they never really make a successful case saying that Lincoln did not love Ann Rutledge. However, in all their arguments they made it quite clear that they didn't want this topic discussed, not in their lifetimes, but rather, they would try to bury it, and bury it they did. It was not for several decades after the scathing attack by Paul M. Angle that someone saw fit to resurrect the story, and breathe new life into the legend. It was time for a new generation of historians to take up the cause of talking about Abraham Lincoln and the possibility that he might have loved Ann Rutledge. It is clear, through the arguments, and through the evidence that Abraham Lincoln and Ann Rutledge

³¹ Rev. James Smith, "The Domestic Life of Abraham Lincoln" newspapers.com

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

were indeed courting one another. It is quite clear that Lincoln was in love with her. It is also quite clear that her death was not easy on Lincoln. All the friends and neighbors were quite clear on all these things. That did not mean that Herndon did not embellish on the story. In fact there are some moments in the lecture that he gave where it is clear that he took the first opinion offered him and believed just that. However, to cover up the evidence that his friends and neighbors gave as testimony that the relationship is a grievous error on our part. We must look at this incident as one of the defining moments in Lincoln's developing life. Giving both evidence that the legend is in part true, and is still of importance to the telling of Lincoln's story. It is only fitting to end with the poem that started this journey, the one by Edgar Lee Masters.

Out of me unworthy and unknown
The vibrations of deathless music;
"With malice towards none, with charity for all."
Out of me the forgiveness of millions towards millions,
And the beneficent face of a nation
Shining with justice and truth.
I am Anne Rutledge who sleeps beneath these weeds,
Beloved in life of Abraham Lincoln
Wedded to him, not through union
But through separation
Bloom forever, O Republic,
From the dust of my bosom!³⁴

³⁴ Edgar Lee Masters, "Anne Rutledge" in *Spoon River Anthology*, (New York, NY: Signet Classics, 2007), 215.

Bibliography

Herndon, William H., and Harry Rosecrans, and Jesse P. Henry, *Lincoln and Ann Rutledge And the Pioneers of New Salem*, Herrin: Trovillion Private Press, 1945.

Walsh, John Evangelist, *The Shadows Rise: Abraham Lincoln and the Ann Rutledge Legend*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993.

Wilson, Douglas L., *Lincoln Before Washington: New Perspectives On The Illinois Years*, Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 1997.

Wilson, Douglas L., and Rodney O. Davis, *Herndon's Informants: Letters, Interviews and Statements About Abraham Lincoln*, Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 1998.

Smith, James, "The Domestic Life of Abraham Lincoln," *The Chicago Tribune*, March 6, 1867, newspapers.com, <http://www.newspapers.com/image/465980089>.

Bunn, John W., "The Domestic Life of Abraham Lincoln" in *The Herald Statesman*, February 12, 1912, [newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com), <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-herald-statesman/143530073>.

Beveridge, Albert J., "Public's Aversion to Facts Problem For Biographers" in *The Indianapolis Star*, March 04, 1924, newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-indianapolis-star/143536570>.

Strozier, Charles B., *Your Friend Forever, A. Lincoln: The Enduring Friendship of Abraham Lincoln and Joshua Speed*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.

Masters, Edgar Lee, "Anne Rutledge" in *Spoon River Anthology*, New York: Signet Classics, 2007.