



Mr. Lincoln's Book: Publishing the Lincoln-Douglas Debates With a Census of Signed Copies

David H. Leroy

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Fifty years ago, David Mearns at the Library of Congress wrote a twenty-page overview of the basic process that led to the publication of the Lincoln-Douglas debates. Here, for the first time in a detailed and readable account focusing on Lincoln's personal involvement, Dave Leroy writes the full story with original correspondence, contemporary newspaper accounts, and photos and illustrations of the day to carry the reader from the dejected debater of 1858 to the surprise president of 1860 who rode a political bestseller to the White House. In 1954, Illinois historian Harry Pratt located and described eighteen inscribed copies of the Lincoln-Douglas Debates. In this new work, 42 signed volumes are identified. Perhaps the last remaining Lincoln mystery is also explained at length: did Lincoln make one or two paste-up scrapbooks of the original newspaper texts of his and Douglas' verbatim debate remarks? If only one existed, why did a New York newspaper account hint at another in December, 1860? If there were two, what became of the second? Like a lawyer before a jury, Leroy marshals the facts to let the reader decide. Ultimately, Mr. Lincoln's Book asks the reader to resolve the century and a half old debate: was Lincoln an author? Some argue that he wasn't, but Leroy leads us to conclude that Lincoln, in more ways than not, was author of the book publishing the debates. It is a rare day when something novel is published about Abraham Lincoln's life and work. Yet 20,000 volumes later, Mr. Lincoln's Book is an unknown study, well researched and compellingly told. The printed volume is accompanied by a CD-ROM containing a complete copy of Lincoln's scrapbook of the debates, copies and transcriptions of Lincoln's correspondence, and some related political cartoons and photographs.

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