Freeport's Lincoln by Wilbur T. Rawleigh (1930) reprinted by Freeport Lincoln-Douglas Society, 1988

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Recommended Readings

**Freeport's Lincoln**


Reviewed by George Geib

W. T. Rawleigh lost his son in the Great War, and wanted to find a way to express the ideals for which the youth died. The result was the creation and dedication of a statue of another great idealist, Abraham Lincoln, to be placed at the site of his 1858 Freeport, Illinois debate with Sen. Stephen Douglas.

This book is a detailed record of the preparation and presentation of the dedication ceremony, originally published by the sponsor in 1930. The range of material is remarkable.

The centerpiece is an address by Senator George Norris, showing how Lincoln would have sided with the Progressive movement. The largest portion of the text is a series of reprints of letters sent by elderly surviving members of the 1858 audience, incorporating their recollections of everything from Lincoln's clothing to the quality of the food at the morning barbecue.

It would be easy to be dismissive of such a book. Norris is today a forgotten figure outside the Tennessee Valley, many of the participants were children who remembered little apart from the excitement of being away from home. But with the recent surge of interest in American memory, in the ways that our society recognizes and draws upon the shifting images of the past, the book is a gem.

Its very scope, incorporating everything from the titles of books on display at the local library to the remarks of forgotten local officials, is a wonderful look into the mindset of the 1920s. And the willingness to allow those aged participants, unedited, to retell stories they had undoubtedly been telling for seventy-one years, is what studies of public memory are all about.

The local historical society did us a great service by issuing this reprint.

- George Geib is professor of history at Butler University.