

Santa Barbara author **Frederic Hunter** to sign books at Chaucers

Abe and Molly: The Lincoln Courtship

By **Kerry Methner** / CASA

MARY TODD LINCOLN, often disparaged by historians as a difficult woman, has found a 21st Century champion in author/screenwriter Frederic Hunter.

Hunter, who recently published *Abe and Molly: The Lincoln Courtship*, re-casts the romance between Mary Todd and Abraham Lincoln, in the light of recent historical scholarship on the couple. Written as a piece of historical fiction, Hunter has sorted through the rumors, secrets, and outright lies that have come to make up the remembered public persona of Mary Todd-Lincoln, spinning the story of her romance and courtship with the awkward Mr. Lincoln. A blend of history as well as a romance novel, Hunter chose the mixed genre to combine dual interests. "I'm a great admirer of Jane Austen. This is a Jane Austen novel set in frontier America in the 1830s. I also wanted to stick as close to what we know about the history as we could," he explained.

"Mary Todd was very badly treated by American History and deserved another look," Hunter continued. "This story sees her up to the age of 24. Mary Todd has a very bad reputation as a difficult woman to deal with. I haven't found her to be that."

To celebrate the book's publication and local release, Hunter will sign books at Chaucer's on Thursday, July 8th at 7pm.

Fifteen years ago, after a career as a foreign service officer and as a foreign correspondent in Africa, Hunter, who was spending a majority of this time writing screenplays for film and television began research on Lincoln. Hunter writes, "Some years ago while researching a film project for PBS, aired as *Lincoln and the War Within*, I stumbled on the story of the courtship between Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd. What a classically romantic tale! She called him Mr. Lincoln. He called her Molly. Two young people attracted across barriers of class and background who manage to break down those barriers to grab a bit of happiness. Great stuff!"

Hunter bases his fiction on as much solid history as he is able to piece together. To provide some transparency for his process, Hunter offers references and footnotes in a final chapter called "Historical Notes." The section includes Hunter's explanations for how he interpreted information and extrapolated events. It also provides interested readers with a substantial biography of related resources. Hunter also applies the fruits of a century of psychological research and development that has become a basis for modern character development.

"I thought this was a fantastic story from the very beginning," he shared. "I was a little surprised to find that Lincoln was challenged to a dual."

Hunter worked to incorporate his historic research in a way that people can enjoy.

"You don't want to have the flow of the story interrupted by the research," he shared. For Hunter, the idea that this woman with an aristocratic background and great education fell in love with a rustic bumpkin, and that she perceived something in him that she was interested in, intrigued him. That their relationship was broken off and then 18 months later it started going again, was also interesting. That slow development, break, and return

included an exploration of the characters' differences as well as what they had in common. "Both of them were interested in politics and both in poetry. They saw something in each other that other people didn't see," he explained.

The story finds Lincoln and Mary Todd at a moment that in a sense that determines how the course of their lives will continue. How they respond to the obstacles related to their families will set a pattern for the future.

"Lincoln is always reaching and yet he doesn't reach beyond his capacity," noted Hunter. "Asking Mary to marry him was a real reach. It must have been a real blow to be told no. But Lincoln had a real sense of integrity. He has ambition that never stopped, that was combined with a sense of integrity. She must have sensed that."

Set in the cultural and historical times when

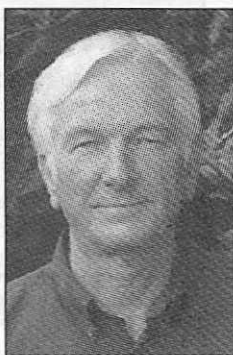
Illinois was the West and still cutting forests and building infrastructure, the story seems simple and plausible, and emphasizes some of the historical tidbits available about a wealthy young woman of a prominent family and her romantic interest - a backwoods lawyer from ignoble parentage. Because of the time passed, what was scandalous or at least daring in the 1800s, seems natural now.

With his background in drama, Hunter especially enjoyed working on the dialogue for pivotal and emotion laden scenes. "It was fun to walk back and forth in my office asking what did they say to each other when he asked to marry her; or what did Ninian say to him during that awful confrontation."

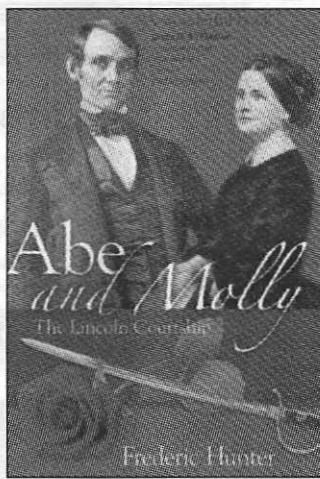
In addition to the romance, several notable figures from American history are introduced on Hunter's pages as important players in a story that brought state and eventually national leaders together in Springfield, the new capital of Illinois.

In addition to Chaucer's, *Abe and Molly* is available locally at Book Den and Tecolote as well as at www.AbeAndMolly.com.

Author **Frederic Hunter** served as a foreign service officer of the United States Information Service in Brussels, Belgium, and at Coquilhatville and Bukavu in the ex-Belgian Congo. He covered sub-Saharan Africa as a foreign correspondent for The Christian Science Monitor. Later he wrote screenplays for film and television, including *Lincoln* and *The War Within* for PBS, which triggered his interest in the Lincoln courtship. His writings include *The Hemingway Play* and *Africa, Africa!*, a collection of fifteen stories. He and his wife Donanne have a website spanning fifty years of experiences in Africa.



Frederic Hunter



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