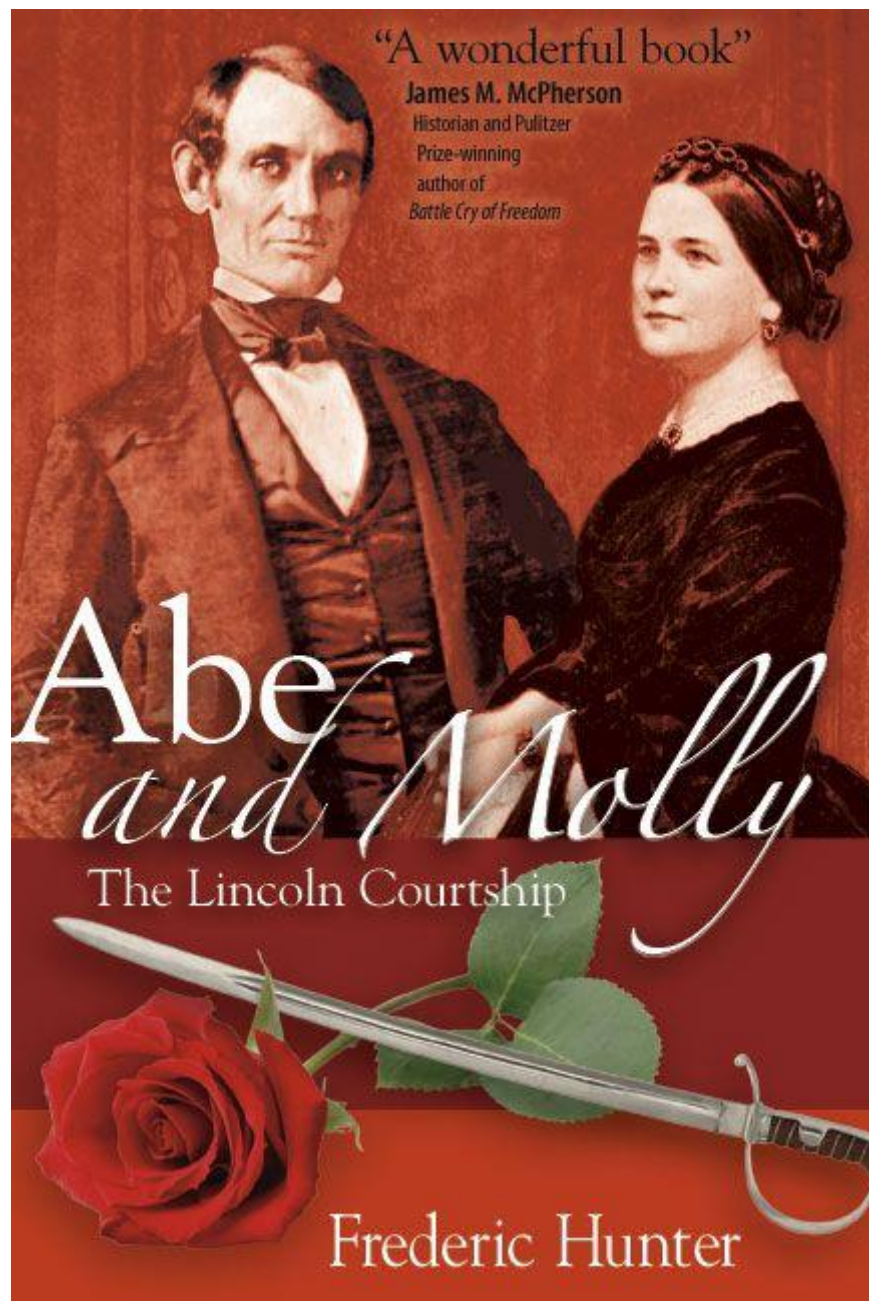


Abe & Molly, and Springfield, get to know each other



Some historians -- no, make that many historians -- have examined the life of Abraham Lincoln in books. Then there's Frederic Hunter. He's written his Lincoln book, too -- but now he's blogging Lincoln's early life, a chapter a week.

The first two LincolnLink posts, just over a year ago, dealt with questions about whether Abe's father was a loser and whether Abe's mother was illegitimate. (All of Hunter's posts, which are chronological, are posed as questions.)

The last few installments have generally focused on Lincoln's arrival in Springfield, and that finally goosed me into writing about LincolnLink -- only about six months after I should have. One recent chapter, "Springfield: Where Would Lincoln Fit In?", looked at how the awkward, countrified Lincoln encountered the young state capital's (relatively) sophisticated smart set.

"William Herndon gives a sense of the problem," Hunter writes. "Now that the state capital was to be located at Springfield, that place began, by way of asserting its social superiority, to put on a good many airs."

Hunter, who now lives in California, isn't a professional historian, but he is a lifelong writer, working stints for the U.S. Information Agency and as the Christian Science Monitor's Africa correspondent, followed by a 25-year career authoring film and TV-movie scripts (IMDB lists some of his credits). He also seems to have read most of the important biographies of Lincoln, and each of his 700-or-so-word updates is carefully footnoted.

In an e-mail interview, Hunter said one of his TV films, "Lincoln and the War Within," which was done for PBS, led him to the story of the Abraham Lincoln-Mary Todd courtship. And that led him to write "Abe and Molly: The Lincoln Courtship," published last year by Nebbadoon Press. Hunter describes "Abe and Molly" as a "mainly true story." It's a novel, with invented situations and dialogue -- but also with a bibliography and nearly 50 pages of historical notes.

"I'd just finished writing three novels set in Africa, basically men's books, and I wanted to do something different," Hunter wrote me. "I'm keen on Jane Austen, and she knows how to do a courtship story."

Hunter generally thinks Mary Lincoln has gotten a raw deal from history (especially from male historians). He says the book calls her "Molly" -- as he reports Abe also did, at least at times -- in order to invite the reader "to view her with new eyes."

"Once 'A&M' was published, blogging seemed a way to increase awareness of the book in a society where getting attention is very challenging," he said in his e-mail. "Has it done that? I don't know. Certainly it

has deepened my own understanding of who Lincoln was and how he developed. I hope it's done that for readers."

"Abe and Molly" remains fiction, of course, but LincolnLink strictly adheres to the known facts, flavored by Hunter's analysis. Hunter is planning, however, to wrap up his blog project in the next few months.

"I'm interested in Lincoln's development up to the marriage -- that is, up to his emergency into real adulthood. ... Then maybe I'll replay the whole thing," he said.

"You learn as you go along in blogging (as in all else)," Hunter added. "LincolnLink just got a 'subscribe' button on the menu. I'd like to try to reach folks who came in late."

Follow the, er, link above to LincolnLink. "Abe and Molly" is \$23.95 in softcover from Nebbadoon Press. A Kindle version is \$7.99 at Amazon. You can read samples at both sites.

Here's the full text of my e-mail interview of Hunter. I think you'll find him an interesting guy.

(The prolific Hunter, with his wife Donanne, has another web site as well, this one devoted to their lives in Africa.)