

# Abraham among the Yankees

## Lincoln's 1848 Visit to Massachusetts

*William F. Hanna*

“Written with charm and verve, *Abraham among the Yankees* remains the best account of what is the least known of Lincoln's speech-making sojourns. William F. Hanna is to be commended for producing this concise and engaging study.”

—Thomas A. Horrocks, author of *Lincoln's Campaign Biographies*

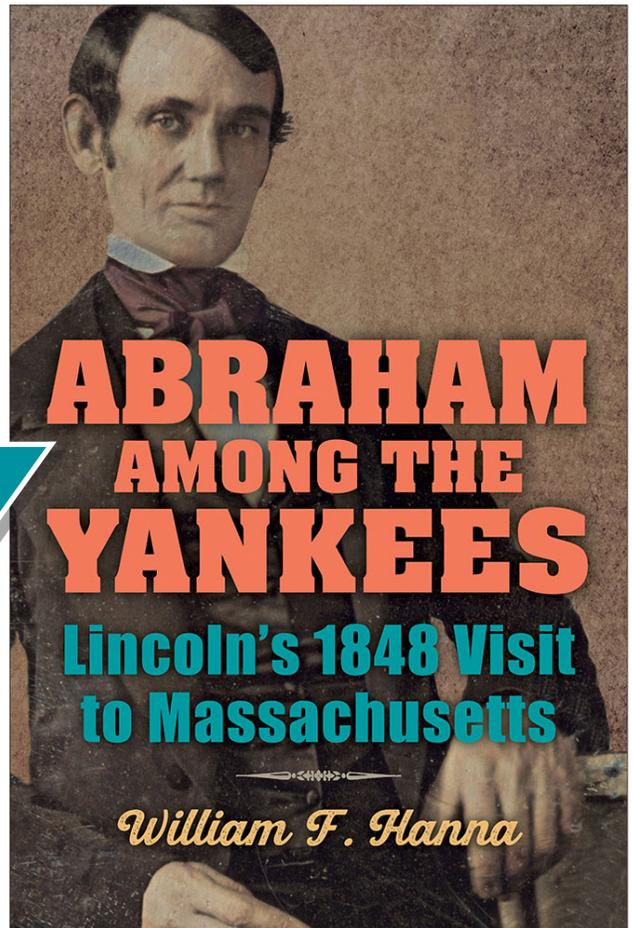
“Thoroughly researched and engagingly written, Hanna's study stands as the definitive account of the only political visit Lincoln ever made to Massachusetts.”—John C. Rodrigue, author of *Lincoln and Reconstruction*

Revealing an overlooked episode  
in Lincoln's political life

Filling in a portion of Lincoln's political career that few are aware of, this engaging travelogue details Lincoln's twelve-day trip through Massachusetts as a young, aspiring Illinois politician campaigning for Zachary Taylor, a slave owner and the Whig candidate for president in 1848. Moving swiftly, William F. Hanna follows Lincoln from town to town, explaining why Lincoln supported a slaveholder and describing one of Lincoln's earliest attempts to appeal to an audience beyond his home territory.

Hanna provides excellent context on the politics of the era, particularly the question of slavery, both in Massachusetts and nationwide, and he features the people Lincoln met and the cities and towns in which he spoke. Lincoln stumped for Taylor in Worcester, New Bedford, Boston, Lowell, Dorchester, Chelsea, Dedham, Cambridge, and Taunton. He gave twelve speeches in eleven days to audiences who responded with everything from catcalls to laughter to applause. Whatever they thought of Lincoln's arguments, those who saw him were impressed by his unusual western style and remembered his style more than the substance of his talks.

Meticulously researched, *Abraham among the Yankees* invites readers to take an East Coast journey with a thirty-nine-year-old Lincoln during election season in 1848 to see how Massachusetts audiences responded to the humorous, informal approach that served Lincoln well during the rest of his political career.



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List of Illustrations

Foreword *Frank J. Williams*

Introduction

Itinerary

**I. Prelude: The Whigs in Turmoil**

Massachusetts, usually a Whig Party stronghold, is in political turmoil in 1848. The party's chances are endangered by the nomination of Zachary Taylor, a deeply unpopular political neophyte and slaveholder. Outraged liberal Whigs promise to support Martin Van Buren, the nominee of the Free Soil Party.

**II. Old Rough and Ready**

A committed partisan at this stage of his career, Lincoln subscribes to the so-called doctrine of availability, that is, Taylor deserves support because he is a sure winner.

**III. Worcester**

Arriving in Massachusetts unannounced, Lincoln speaks at an outdoor rally prior to the Whig state convention. As he campaigns for Taylor, his Worcester audience notes his humorous, informal stump speaking style.

**IV. New Bedford**

Speaking in a New Bedford hall, Lincoln tries pragmatism and argues that while Van Buren could never win the election, he could take enough votes from Taylor to ensure the success of the Democrat, Lewis Cass.

**V. Boston: Washington Hall**

Giving the first of two speeches in Boston, Lincoln again criticizes the Free Soilers. Van Buren, Lincoln says, is like a gun that goes off at both ends; it will kill the bad guy and the good guy at once.

**VI. Lowell**

Lowell provides one of the fullest descriptions of Lincoln's style. Samuel Hadley attends the Whig rally, to which all "Van Buren converts" are invited. Lincoln uses his standard speech, and Hadley thinks him "a forceful and candid man . . . rather than an eloquent one."

**VII. Dorchester and Chelsea**

Newspaper treatment of the two of the least covered of Lincoln's speeches is predictably partisan. In Dorchester, Lincoln is introduced as a descendant of the "Hingham[, Mass.] Lincolns" as well as of Revolutionary hero General Benjamin Lincoln. Attendees are more impressed that his head almost reaches the ceiling.

**VIII. Dedham**

Here George Monroe gives the best description of Lincoln in Massachusetts. Seemingly morose and miserable when he arrives, Lincoln soon has the audience begging him to stay.

**IX. Cambridge**

It is in Cambridge that Lincoln is favorably described as "a capital specimen of a 'Sucker' Whig, six feet at least in his stockings."

**X. Taunton**

This chapter brings the last detailed description of Lincoln's stump style and message, as well as the longest and most cogent critique of his address.

**XI. Boston: Tremont Temple**

In his last appearance, Lincoln appears alongside former New York governor William H. Seward. Afterward, Lincoln is alleged to have told Seward, "I reckon you're right. We have got to deal with this slavery question."

**XII. Epilogue**

Taylor wins the election. Shortly after the last Boston rally a newspaper reports that despite "the many applications we daily receive from different parts of the State, for this gentleman to speak," he has already left.

Notes

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