

## *Register of Informants*

The brief biographical data given below represent an attempt to afford the reader some indication of who William H. Herndon's informants were and to suggest the kind of relationship, if any, each may have had with Abraham Lincoln. In consulting these entries, the reader is cautioned to bear in mind certain considerations. First, as most of these informants are not historic figures in the ordinary sense, basic information about them is generally hard to come by and has frequently proved unobtainable. In some cases it has not even been possible to ascertain birth and death dates. By contrast, the lives of some otherwise very obscure informants, thanks to genealogists and family historians, are reasonably well documented. Thus the information available to the editors has been highly uneven, and this circumstance is necessarily reflected in the entries.

Second, while the editors have endeavored to indicate possible sources of prejudice, the biases of Herndon's informants, like those of people in general, are often submerged and difficult to gauge. Politics is an obvious example. Many of the informants from Menard County, for instance, were Democrats and politically opposed to Lincoln for much of his career. Yet they often seem to be personally well disposed toward the man himself, who in turn was known for his ability to get along well with his political adversaries. Nor were political allegiances always static and straightforward. For example, to the intensely political men in Lincoln's circle who had to find their way past the wreckage of the Whig party in the 1850s, it mattered greatly whether one found refuge in the traditional Democratic party, took up with the nativist American party, or made common cause with the abolitionists by joining the Republican party. While these differences might be the source of bitter resentments and hard feelings, they were not always or equally so, and it is probably fair to say that most of the informants who disagreed with Lincoln's political course still liked him personally.

Third, in the absence of more pertinent information about the informants' character and credibility, circumstances showing their status or standing in their community are frequently cited, though it is duly acknowledged that these are no guarantors of integrity or reliability where personal testimony is concerned. Thus, gaining the limelight by election or appointment to office, while possibly indicative of public favor, is not here equated with honesty or candor. Nonetheless, such circumstances are offered to help identify the informants and to indicate their backgrounds and distinctions.

Full citations for the sources given in abbreviated form can be found in the Short Citations and Abbreviations section on pages xxix–xxxii. The letters cited