tenets of Christianity; he had proposed marriage to several women, and after be-
coming engaged to his future wife, Mary Todd, had fallen in love with someone
else; and after a long period of guilt and indecision, he had finally given himself
up to a loveless marriage to satisfy his sense of honor.

Nearly all of this was news to Herndon, who soon realized that the picture he
was in the process of putting together was scandalously at odds with what other
biographers had presented and with what the worshiping public had come to ex-
ppect. When he tried out some of his findings on the public in November 1866—
in a lecture on Lincoln’s tragic courtship of Ann Rutledge—he tactlessly gave of-
fense by urging his own hypothesis that Ann’s untimely death was a principal source
of Lincoln’s lifelong melancholy and that Ann herself was the only woman Lin-
coln had ever loved.\footnote{Herndon’s lecture, “ABRAHAM LINCOLN. MISS ANN RUTLEDGE. NEW SALEM. PIONEER-
ING AND THE POEM” was delivered on November 16, 1866, and distributed as a broadside. It has been
reprinted in William H. Herndon, Lincoln and Ann Rutledge and the Pioneers of New Salem (Herrin, Ill.:
Trovillion Private Press, 1945).} When critics and friends alike objected that he was treating
subjects that should be left alone, he justified his approach with a doctrine of “nec-
essary truth.” It held that private and inappropriate to published biography as
certain facts or conditions might ordinarily be considered, they were necessary
to the understanding of Lincoln’s character, which in turn was the key to what the
man had ultimately accomplished. Defending himself to a friend, Herndon wrote:
“All truths are necessary that show, explain, or throw light on Mr. Lincoln’s mind,
nature, quality, characteristics, thoughts, acts and deeds, because he [suppressed]
the Rebellion . . . and guided the grandest of Revolutions through its grand con-
sumation.”\footnote{WHH to Isaac N. Arnold, Nov. 20, 1866, in Hertz, 38–39. For a fuller treatment of Herndon’s
doctrine of “necessary truth,” see Wilson, 37–52.}

Knowing that he had additional revelations to make, even more unwelcome
and potentially disruptive than the Ann Rutledge story, gave Herndon serious
pause. Especially the ambiguous and inconsistent nature of the testimony he col-
lected about Lincoln’s paternity, from Kentucky informants he did not know and
whom he had never questioned face-to-face, seems to have contributed to his in-
ability to complete a draft of his biography.\footnote{See Wilson, 40–41, 46–47.}

Herndon’s plan was to draft his biography in 1867, but with the death of his
father in that year and his subsequent inheritance of a substantial farm, Herndon
let his biographical project languish. In 1869, under serious financial pressure, he

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{WHH to Charles H. Hart, Dec. 12, 1866, Lamon Papers, HL.}
\item \footnote{WHH to Charles H. Hart, Dec. 28, 1866, Lamon Papers, HL.}
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