placed much of what Herndon had collected in historiographical limbo. So successful was this critique among historians and biographers that even though much of what is known about Lincoln's pre-presidential years comes directly through Herndon, his name as a biographer has been seriously tarnished, and the evidence he assembled has for many decades been widely regarded with suspicion.30

While the prejudice against Herndon and his informant testimony still prevails, historians and biographers generally are much more open to the type of evidence he collected, and reminiscence no longer needs an elaborate defense as a historical source. While its liabilities continue to be well understood, its special importance is more widely recognized, so that reminiscence is nowadays considered essential by the most discerning historians and biographers. In the intervening years, oral history has become a respected subdiscipline of the historical profession, with a canon of its own.31 From the outset, its practitioners have been careful to identify the unique character of memory when used as an adjunct to traditional sources. Oral history has been hailed from its beginnings as an enterprise that has empowered the subliterate or the underdocumented by providing them a historical voice.32 Professional practitioners are well apprised of informants' frequent tendency to confuse events chronologically, or to telescope them, and of the need to seek corroboration from a number of oral accounts of the same event.33 Though they acknowledge the vagaries of memory and emphasize the need to develop interrogation techniques that will ensure the fullest and most accurate interviews possible, oral historians have succeeded in demonstrating the value of reminiscence as an important historical source.34

There are, in fact, many indications in the material presented in this edition and elsewhere that Herndon himself was far from naïve about reminiscence or its pitfalls. As the readers of this work will soon discover, he frequently questioned his informants on what he heard from others, checked up on conflicting accounts, and with certain informants made a point of revisiting their testimony.35 After selling copies of his “Lincoln Record” to Ward Hill Lamon, he counseled: “Human memory is uncertain and it is possible that somewhat of my ideas and opinions is made up of rumor and rumor alone. I state this to you to put you on your

30. See Wilson, 21–36.
31. The substance of oral history may be defined as testimony about events and situations that occurred during the lifetime of the informants. See Jan Vansina, Oral Tradition as History (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 12.
35. See, for example, WHH’s queries reflected in letters from Dennis F. Hanks: §§143, 160, 161, 165.