guard as to what I say, and what all men say. Much of the matter is ten years old,
and watch all men, weigh well what is said, search for opportunities, casts of mind,
education, and veracities. Follow no man simply because he says so and so. Follow
your records, sharply criticizing as you go.”36

As this passage suggests, Herndon knew from his own experience how mem-
ories can fade and become elusive. When his biography was finally in proofs, for
example, he developed a concern about his own first glimpse of Abraham Lincoln
and wrote to his collaborator: “Be sure that Lincoln Came all the way up to Bogue’s
Mill. It seems to me that he did and that, I at that time, saw Lincoln, but be sure
that I am right. The records [i.e., his letters and interviews, then in Weik’s posses-
sion] will fix it — it has now been 56 years since I saw what now seems to be the
truth to me. Try and get me right. If L Came up to Bogues mill I saw Lincoln &
if he did not then I did not see him at Bogues mill.”37 While this dramatizes the
precarious qualities of memory, it also demonstrates that Herndon was, to the last,
deeply concerned about historical accuracy and more than willing, if the evidence
warranted, to have his own memory corrected.

The letters, interviews, and statements included in this edition all relate to
William H. Herndon’s biographical project, but they are limited, with few excep-
tions, to those that purport to provide information or informed opinion about
Abraham Lincoln. The great majority of these documents were received or taken
down by Herndon himself, but his own personal recollections of Lincoln are out-
side the scope of this work. A respectable number of documents containing infor-
mant testimony resulted from the work of his collaborator, Jesse W. Weik. Weik
continued his Lincoln inquiries after completion of the collaborative biography,
but letters and interviews that he collected are restricted in this work to those ac-
quired in the service of Herndon’s overall project, which began in 1865 and end-
ed with publication of the revised edition of their biography in 1892. The mate-
rials on Lincoln collected by Weik after that date for other projects are therefore
not included. Correspondents who merely supplied copies of Lincoln’s letters are
ignored. These selection criteria effectively exclude from the present work a very
substantial portion of Herndon’s and Weik’s papers, so that students interested in
the progress and details of Herndon’s biographical project, in Herndon’s own writ-
ing on Lincoln, or in the material on Lincoln that Weik acquired after the appear-
ance of the revised edition will need to supplement this edition with a wider array
of documents.

Readers of the material presented here will readily perceive that the pertinence
and quality of the testimony offered by Herndon’s informants vary widely. Not
surprisingly, witnesses are often demonstrably wrong in their recollections of fact.
Particularly in such unforgiving matters as dates, informants are often in error
(though perhaps a more remarkable circumstance is how often they are right). It

36. WHH to Ward Hill Lamon, Mar. 6, 1870, Lamon Papers, HL.
37. WHH to JWW, Nov. 10, 1888, HW.