

## *Editorial Note*

### TEXT

The editors have attempted to reproduce the texts of these documents exactly as found—word for word and letter for letter. But the reader is warned that this is not always the straightforward process that it appears. As Roy P. Basler, the most notable Lincoln editor of the twentieth century, wrote: “To record what the eye could see seemed simple enough. With Lincoln’s handwriting being what it was, however, the trouble was to know what one saw.”<sup>1</sup> And Lincoln’s is a reasonably legible hand. Because writers frequently form words without forming discrete and discernible letters, handwritten text is often difficult to transcribe into print. Where this does not pose a problem as to what word was intended, there may still be a question regarding the intended spelling. The difference between a capital and a lowercase letter, though clear and potentially meaningful in print, may be very difficult to discern in a handwritten text. Another consideration is that Herndon’s manuscripts contain the expected anomalies of unrevised composition, such as inadvertently dropped or repeated words. In accordance with the editorial plan followed here, even in the cases where the errors are clearly inadvertent—as with misspellings and dropped or repeated words—the document is always rendered as found, errors and all.

The resulting text makes demands on readers that a regularized or modernized text does not. Certain peculiarities of nineteenth-century spelling and punctuation present difficulties. Some of the writers represented here used scarcely any punctuation at all, while others used commas and dashes in profusion and in ways that seem to the modern eye whimsical or strange. Although some writers appear to have had their own fairly consistent system of punctuation—the most obvious being those who used none at all—most simply refused to restrict the comma or the dash or even the period to a fixed use.

Marks clearly intended as punctuation are sometimes ambiguous and might be, for example, taken as representing either a period or a comma. In such cases, the mark is here given a conventional interpretation, so that a mark at the end of a sentence that might be either a comma or a period is rendered in the text as a period. Certain other familiar aspects of nineteenth-century handwriting have been dispensed with.

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1. Roy P. Basler, ed., *Abraham Lincoln: His Speeches and Writing* (Cleveland and New York: World Publishing Co., 1946), xxv.