When F. Lauriston Bullard died in 1952, he was a popular author and a winner of the Pulitzer Prize. He was also a well-known Abraham Lincoln scholar. In fact, for the last productive decade of his already prolific life, he was almost entirely focused on the sixteenth president. His fourth book on the subject, *Lincoln in Marble and Bronze*, was printed only months before his death. In addition to this work, he published on a breathtaking range of Lincoln-related subjects in three other short books—*Tad and his Father; A Few Appropriate Remarks: Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address; and Abraham Lincoln and the Widow Bixby*—as well as a number of articles. An incomplete list of the latter includes “Lincoln and the Courts of the District of Columbia,” “Abraham Lincoln and the Statehood of Nevada,” “Abraham Lincoln and Henry Adams: A Contrast in Education,” “Lincoln’s Conquest of New England,” “When Lincoln Visited Mount Vernon,” “What Andrew Boyd and Charles Henry Hart Did for Abraham Lincoln,” “Who Owns Lincoln,” “When Lincoln Ruled Alone,” “Lincoln’s Copy of Pope’s Poems,” “Abraham Lincoln and George Ashmun,” “Marx and Lincoln,” “Abe Goes down the River,” “Lincoln as a Jeffersonian” and “The Magnanimity of Abraham Lincoln.”

At a dinner in 1940, Logan Hay, president of the Abraham Lincoln Association, introduced Bullard as a “wild-catter in the Lincoln field” (he meant it as a compliment). It was true when he said it, and was amplified by the more than three

1. Bullard was waylaid by a sickness in 1948 that cut significantly into his output for about a year. He returned to writing in 1950.

dozen Lincoln articles Bullard would write in the following years. He spent much of his life thinking and reading about the president and in his last years, when he finally had a great opportunity, put that dedication to good use.

Still, reading the various accounts of Bullard’s life in obituaries and remembrances, one would easily get the sense that he was also something of a renaissance man. A tireless reader, he was fluent in a range of non-Lincoln subjects, from tennis to lilacs to William Makepeace Thackeray. For the last forty-five years of his life he wrote almost constantly—only in his final decade was it primarily about Lincoln. In addition to writing Boston Herald editorials for twenty-four years and serving as an editorial correspondent for the New York Times (“writing discerningly of opinions in the New England States regarding sectional and national issues,” the newspaper’s obituary noted), he also wrote a book about war correspondents and another about New England Homes. Like many newspapermen, he was a prolific generalist.

The encomiums that celebrated this popular man’s life mentioned this fact, while also delving into the minutiae of Bullard’s background—one went far enough to note that his ancestry (“English, of course”) was rooted in the town of Bury St. Edmunds and that his grandmother was of “sturdy Welsh ancestry.” Many accounts also noted that he was a dedicated collector of written and printed works, most from the Civil War era. His collection of Lincolniana was so impressive it now helps form the nucleus of Boston University’s holdings in the area. Still, every biographical sketch of the man failed


to even allude to the single most life-altering fact about F. Lauriston Bullard, the sine qua non of his career as a Lincoln scholar: he was a book thief.

Hailing from northwest Ohio, Bullard was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the College of Wooster and a magna cum laude recipient, in 1893, of a degree from the Yale University Divinity School. The following year he wed Pittsburgh’s Clara Keil—a woman with whom he would have five children and a sixty-year marriage. An “aristocratic looking man with large, expressive blue eyes and a Vandyke beard,” the Boston Herald later noted, he was, by most accounts, educated, likable, and dynamic on the pulpit. He was certainly in demand. In his relatively short clerical career, he was almost constantly on the move, his full-time ministering positions including stops in Dayton and Circleville, Ohio; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Saratoga Springs, New York; and Brandon, Vermont. Throughout this time he always seemed to be ready to move again for a better opportunity, while still managing to engender good feelings in the people he left behind. For example, the Circleville Daily Union Herald noted, as he was about to decamp to another town, “Undoubtedly whatever may be the plans of Rev. Mr. Bullard as to the future he will get along well in the world, as he is a scholarly man wont to delve with the musty tomes and extract the hidden sweets of knowledge.” (The second half of that sentence seems a meaningless piece of flattery, but maybe there was something to it. Forty years later, one writer noted Bullard’s knack for “boring for the hidden reservoirs of truth” in the Lincoln field.)

Throughout his time as a minister, he was extracting these hidden sweets of knowledge wherever he went, collecting books, letters, and documents from a range of sources even as he was making a name for himself doing the work of God. However much his vocation consumed him, his avocation proved equally important—keeping him busy and even informing his preaching. His collecting taste ran to books and documents having to do with the Civil War, and his print and manuscript material included anything involving Salmon P. Chase, Edward Bates, Gideon Welles, Schuyler Colfax, Charles Sumner, Hamilton Fish, and various other less important Civil War-era men. Still, he was most seriously focused on Abraham Lincoln, gathering whatever

he could about the sixteenth president. He spent so much time on Lincoln, in fact, that it cross-pollinated his ministering: he lectured extensively on the life and Christian beliefs of the president. He believed wholeheartedly in the “great man” view of teaching history, and lectured regularly to his congregants on historical topics both within the church tradition and without.

But in addition to his collecting, preaching, and fathering, the other thing he was doing during his time as a minister was working his way back east. When he graduated from Yale in 1893, he moved west to Ohio to get his start. After that, every subsequent job he took was another lurch back toward the east coast, the place he felt most at home. By 1905 he was in Brandon, Vermont—a mere train ride from Boston and its wonderful stock of books.

Library theft is easy. These institutions have always been pathetically underprotected and simple to steal from and, as a consequence, have always been targets. But they were never more vulnerable than in the early part of the twentieth century. Boston and the small Massachusetts towns that surrounded it were regular victims, thanks largely to the terrific material lining their open shelves and the fact that “Americana”—a broad area of collecting that included basically anything printed in or about the United States in the nineteenth century—was becoming a valuable commodity. With American first-edition books, manuscripts, atlases, and various other pieces of printed ephemera housed on open bookshelves, libraries were a rich vein for collectors and dealers. In an environment where librarians simply did not think much about book security, patron honesty was regularly relied on as a means of theft prevention. This was an imperfect system.

9. See, in general, the Abraham Lincoln Collection at Boston University’s Howard Gottlieb Archival Research Center. The items that once belonged to Bullard and to Edward C. Stone comprise the nucleus of this collection; Bullard’s material is still housed together, and a glimpse of its inventory demonstrates the range of his collecting. His focus on Lincoln was said to stem from a remark made by his friend James Ford Rhodes; Rhodes felt, in retrospect, his own career would have been better served by focusing on one of two figures: Lincoln or Robert E. Lee. Recounted in “Frederick Lauriston Bullard, 1866–1952” Lincoln Herald 53 (1952): 47–49.

10. See, for example, “About Lincoln’s Religion,” Blue Grass Blade, March 9, 1902. Much of the material he gathered and used in lectures would also inform his later writings on the matter.


Bookshop theft, on the other hand, was different. Especially for those in the rare and antiquarian business, whose livelihoods depended on the sale of just a few books, security was taken seriously. Most could ill afford to lose any of their product, let alone scores of valuable first editions, so they watched their patrons with alacrity and called it customer service. This was usually discouragement enough to would-be thieves, who preferred the relative ease (and, often, legal impunity) of stealing from libraries. But theft from booksellers, while more difficult, had unique appeal. For one thing, a thief had to do very little thinking when stealing from a bookseller: the best books, with their values penciled inside their covers, were neatly arranged. Also, for a man interested in things like correspondence or autographed editions, libraries had little to offer; booksellers, a great deal more. Still, the risk was sometimes off-putting, particularly for a repeat thief. Where a dozen books missing from a library might not be discovered for several months—and when discovered might not be attributed to a serial thief—even one or two blank spots on a bookseller’s shelf would raise an almost immediate alarm. And in the tight-knit world of secondhand bookselling, word of multiple thefts traveled fast. So in the autumn of 1907, when news began to circulate that there was a serial thief with fine taste on the prowl, bookmen took notice. Many thieves tended to move on after thefts, wandering from city to city, town to town, stealing from libraries and booksellers. This crime spree, which appeared to start in early September, seemed to be something different.

As the weeks dragged on and the crimes continued, the Boston police were contacted. Two detectives, William Sheehan and William Pelton, were assigned to the case. They did not have any particular interest or aptitude in rare-book theft—aside from a few librarians in charge of institutions that had been victims, few did—they were simply in the area that was home to so many victimized booksellers. As it happened, this case was Pelton’s first since being promoted to detective sergeant, a recently created job, and so he had extra incentive to perform well.

Still, there was not a great deal to do in the wake of a book theft, so the detectives set about the task the same way they would any other theft. The best thing to do was to catch the thief in the act, a goal most likely accomplished by attentive bookstore employees. With that in mind, detectives counseled the bookmen to take special

13. Traditionally, the people who care most about book theft are the victims of a recent theft. By 1911, however, the New York Public Library hired a man whose sole job it was to protect the collection from thieves and vandals.
note of shoppers demonstrating book thief potential. Of course, book thief potential was not easily distinguished from book buyer potential. The main book thief asset at the time was a large overcoat. The best, described in the 1930s by writer Harry Kurnitz, was “a loose raglan coat, so artfully fitted with hooks, slings, and pockets that the works of Charles Dickens, on large paper, could nestle under it without showing a bulge.” But any large coat would do. And because most men at the time wore them, even in warm weather, this was not the tip-off it would be today. The only other real giveaway for a book thief was his general demeanor: shifty, nervous, and furtive. A large coat helped disguise this clue, too.

Bullard owned an overcoat, of course, and used it in his thefts. But he had other advantages. The unique access libraries conferred upon him, as a scholar and a clergyman, helped his thefts as they had so many others before him. But he was also an upstanding member of the community and on the board of the Brandon, Vermont, public library. This put him in good with other libraries. (There was never any public accusation that he stole from his own library, though he was later accused of stealing from the Baxter Memorial Library in nearby Rutland). By 1907 all of his great access to Massachusetts library collections—generally thought to be the best public library collections in the country—had given him a fine taste in books. He was later called a connoisseur, though that might have been a stretch. It would have been easy to accumulate a stock of great books when he was getting many of them for free. Anyway, more important than good taste in books was good taste in booksellers—and Bullard most certainly had that. Two of the better dealers of antiquarian books in Boston were Charles Goodspeed and Charles Lauriat, and both, in the fall of 1907, were Bullard victims.

Neither bookseller, by that point, had been in business yet ten years. The Charles E. Lauriat Company had the most impressive pedigree, having once been half of the partnership of Estes and Lauriat, an establishment of “general bookselling, publishing and importing.” But in 1898 Lauriat essentially started over, dissolving the partnership. His new independent store was at 385 Washington Street and was, for book shoppers, an establishment hard to miss. Aside from its central location a block from the Boston Common, the opulent storefront proclaimed the name of the company fully seven times: on a marquee

above the store, on the awning, on two windows, beneath two other windows and once again in the area just below the awning. The numeric address—385—was worked into the same space five times.

The interior of Lauriat’s was narrow but very long and had high ceilings that made it look like a small airplane hangar. Selling an array of books (“old and new” the front of the store also managed to announce), it had a Balcony Book Room stocked with first editions as well as signed and association copies, and an Old Book Room, with piles and piles of antiquarian books where some real gems could be found. It was the sort of store a person could get lost in, and Bullard prowled its contents with a discriminating eye.

Goodspeed’s, founded in the same year a little more than a block away, could not have had a more different setup. Though it faced the Boston Common and was a stone’s throw from the Massachusetts State House, the place was much less grand than its location suggested. The little shop that was destined to become a Boston institution was really just a glorified basement. The front windows of the store were no taller than shoulder height for an average man, and most of the books in the crowded display were below knee level. Charles Goodspeed’s later recollections of the spartan early days of the shop sound, in retrospect, quaint and homey, but in the early part of the twentieth century the accommodations mostly made a difficult profession more difficult. There was no heat in the place, for one thing, except that from a furnace pipe along the ceiling. “When the weather became cold we relied on a large open fireplace for warmth. . . . Once or twice the roaring blaze nearly brought disaster. At the best, it was difficult to make the room liveable in the winter, and on mornings when the cold was severe, several hours might pass before our benumbed hands could do any work.”

Each of these stores, with their fine stock of old books, was a magnet to Bullard. And, though their setups were different, they were both similarly vulnerable to theft. While the intimate settings of Goodspeed’s would seem to allow the shopkeeper to keep a close eye on patrons, the dark and cool basement setting not only diminished good line of sight but also encouraged men to keep their large coats on. As for Lauriat’s, the cavernous store was brightly lit but did not allow much scrutiny of individual patrons.

By October both establishments had had enough book theft, and so were on extra guard for thieves. Not knowing this, Bullard made his way into Goodspeed’s a little before 2 p.m. on Thursday, October 17. Long-

time book thieves have a tendency to become complacent—attentive to their craft at first, they become sloppy and overconfident with success. While this error does not always lead to their downfall, serial thieves are especially susceptible to the iron law of statistics: the more times you risk detection, the greater the likelihood you will be caught.

Bullard had already stolen from Lauriat’s that day and was going to return to his hotel after his visit to Goodspeed’s. As a man who had frequented the store before and was both well dressed and well spoken, he was not expecting much scrutiny. Nor would his large overcoat attract concern—the weather was cool and breezy that day and so he knew himself not to look out of the ordinary. What he did not know was that being well dressed did not absolve him of scrutiny at that point in the serial theft spree. In fact, by the latter part of the nineteenth century, many people in the book business had learned through hard experience that educated, professional people stole books. It was something even Melvil Dewey noted, succinctly, in a discussion at the New York Library Club in 1885: “Well-dressed, gentlemanly looking men steal books.”

18 If this had been a lesson lost on Boston booksellers before Bullard, by the fall of 1907 they were embracing the idea wholeheartedly.

Goodspeed’s was to be the fourth place he stole from on that short trip alone, so he may have approached the theft somewhat perfunctorily. Whatever the reason, he browsed the crowded little store with a modicum of caution before slipping a first edition copy of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *An Inland Voyage* into his overcoat. It was worth roughly twenty dollars—a nice bit of money in 1907—and not the sort of thing Goodspeed’s could afford to lose. Bullard also unburdened the store of a copy of Alexander Nowell’s *Catechism*, published by John Daye in London in 1573. This sheepskin-bound book was, despite its age, in a fine state of preservation.

19 Unfortunately for the reverend, he went a book too far: the second of these thefts was noticed by an attentive store clerk. The man immediately clapped hands on him and sent for the police. Bullard did what every thief does in this situation—he bargained with the clerk, pleading it was a mistake and offering to make restitution.

20 Second only to a claim that mental illness compelled the thefts, the “mistake” excuse is very popular among book thieves. And while it is always

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possible that a single book taken from a single store or library could be a mistake, it is not possible that many books taken from many places over the course of many dates is a mistake. In any event, it was to no avail. The clerk was under strict orders and would not let Bullard go before the police showed up.

Detective Sergeant Pelton arrived at the store in short order to arrest the reverend. Bullard made a feeble attempt to break free when he saw the police coming but was stopped before he reached the door of the basement shop. Whether or not Bullard recognized this as the end of his meteoric rise in the clergy, the New York Tribune noted he was certainly “keenly sensitive of his position when placed under arrest.”21 Because of this awareness—and a natural flare for the dramatic—he was overcome by shame on the sales floor of Goodspeed’s, weeping and lamenting under the gaze of the police. But while this display made an impression on other patrons, it had no influence on the authorities. They walked him out like any other criminal.

The strange thing was that Bullard’s emoting almost certainly had a detrimental effect on his case. Because of his tears and general desire to unburden himself of guilt, Detective Pelton had little difficulty getting Bullard to admit the thefts and still less persuading him to take authorities to his hotel room. In transit, Bullard wept more violently, protesting not only that this was his first offence but that his wife and five children were expecting to meet him shortly. None of it mattered. Once they got to his room, a quick search there turned up more stolen books.

Bullard was then taken to the local police station, and while he did not exactly break down in tears, a reporter for the Boston Globe noted “it was plain to see that he had to make a great effort to keep his composure.”22 The police treated him rather gently because of it. Nevertheless, he spent the night in jail—where he alternately moaned and prayed—and was arraigned the next day in criminal court on four separate warrants for thefts that took place, in addition to the one at Goodspeed’s, on September 6, October 14, and October 16.23 The police also said there was reason to suspect Bullard made a habit of stealing these sorts of books and going to New York to sell them, an entirely believable conjecture since, with some regularity, men stole rare and antiquarian books from places in Massachusetts and sold them for

22. “Clergyman Is under Arrest.”
profit to book dealers in New York City. Bullard’s counsel requested a continuance until the following week, and it was granted without objection. His bail was supplied by an upstanding friend in Brookline, and Bullard was allowed to leave. Soon he hired an attorney from the powerful Boston firm Whipple, Sears, and Ogden.

Word of the arrest traveled fast to Brandon. Most there, where he had an excellent reputation, believed the arrest was all some kind of mistake. The feeling was that an investigation would lead to Bullard’s release and a prompt dismissal of the charges. Still, if his supporters wanted reassurance from the reverend himself, they were disappointed. Bullard, once he returned to Brandon, holed up at home and refused entry to anyone. A few days later he left again for the anonymity of Boston, fleeing without a word of explanation on the 10:20 p.m. train. Avoiding friends, acquaintances, and anyone from town, he managed, a Boston reporter heard, to get to the train station unseen and then “swung onto the rear platform of the last car” as it pulled away.

The supporters who felt Reverend Bullard would be released without prosecution were, of course, right—but not because he was innocent. Consistent with countless similar book-theft crimes both before and after, the stolen books—or, at least, those from his most recent thefts—were returned to their rightful owners and everyone agreed to drop the matter. What made this exercise in charge dropping different from those in most other crimes was that it was booksellers, not libraries, that let the thief go. Libraries, those hapless victim institutions, have by force of long tradition granted near blanket immunity to book thieves who return stolen items and promise never to do it again. Booksellers were not noted for this particularly generous trait. So, on this occasion, the reluctance of booksellers to press prosecution almost certainly had to do with the standing of Bullard in the local community, and the people of both political and monetary means who stood in his corner. Whatever the reason, on October 25, Bullard appeared in court for a final time. Without his wife and family, and with his head bowed deeply into his buttoned-up raincoat—looking like a turtle trying to slink into its shell—he listened without emotion as Judge James Parmenter discharged him from custody.

Aside from that first night, the reverend spent no time in jail.

24. “Jailed Preacher on Charge of Theft.” Also see McDade.
Still, despite his freedom, he could not go back to his old life. The idea that the thefts were simply a mistake soon enough gave way to at least partial recognition of the truth: the thefts were exactly what they appeared to be. Bullard’s love of books, not to mention his impressive personal library, was well known to his congregants—so most realized he was guilty. In general, they chalked it up to that hardy perennial of book thieves: bibliomania. As one congregant put it, “his love of books must have turned his mind temporarily.” More officially, three Brandon physicians, who had observed Bullard over the prior few months, signed affidavits to the effect that the man was “more or less mentally unbalanced.”

But another member of his flock came closer to the truth, noting that Bullard, having “wavered long between his love of literature and his salary as a country pastor” had finally “succumbed to temptation.” Bullard wanted things he simply did not have the money to pay for, a reason he had in common with most other thieves. He loved books and historical objects, and because by the turn of the century the very items he liked to collect—Americana—were becoming popular with collectors of means, he could simply not afford to buy the things he wanted. So he took them. There is no way to know how long he made a habit of stealing books, but it was almost certainly for several years. His personal collection was beyond the level of a man of his humble salary, and as both a reverend and a scholar, he would routinely have had access to fine library material of the sort others would not.

His clerical career in shambles, Bullard resigned in early November and left Brandon for an extended stay in the Adirondacks. After that, according to the Boston Globe, he went to the “Brattleboro retreat for the insane for further rest and treatment.” This time away did him well. By early 1908 he was making a good recovery, gaining several pounds and improving his general well-being.

Whatever effect it had on his ailing soul, Bullard’s time away from his congregation and family certainly had a positive influence on his writing. In February 1909, some sixteen months after his arrest for the

thefts, he published three separate Lincoln-related articles: “The New England Ancestry of Abraham Lincoln” appeared in New England Magazine, “The Religion of Abraham Lincoln” in Congregationalist and Christian World, and “Lincoln and the London Punch” in the Boston Globe. While this output was an accurate reflection of Bullard’s penchant for writing on many aspects of the president, it was not representative of the appetite general-interest publications had for such articles. These were desired only because of the one-hundredth anniversary of Lincoln’s birth; a few months later, the interest, like the anniversary, had passed and Bullard found himself living in Boston with no steady income. So he did what he could, freelancing for magazines and local newspapers. This work would soon enough lead to a regular job with the Boston Herald that allowed him to continue the itinerant ways he had known as a minister.

One of the fruits of all that traveling was his first book, in 1912: Historic Summer Haunts from Newport to Portland. Published by Boston’s Little, Brown, and Company, it was both well received and popular thanks to Bullard’s writing abilities and, according to one reviewer, Bullard’s “knowledge and sympathy of long acquaintance” with the subject. Less than two years later he was out with another book on a different subject altogether: Famous War Correspondents, also published by Little, Brown. Then he returned to Lincoln. In 1915 he published the first of his four books on some aspect of the president, Tad and His Father. By that time, he was an editor at the Boston Sunday Herald; four years later he became the chief editorial writer at the newspaper. He continued to labor on his writing in Boston, making a comfortable living at it. He also kept collecting books. Then, almost exactly nineteen years after he was set free by Judge Parmenter, he wrote an editorial for the Boston Herald calling for a new trial, based on new evidence, for Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, anarchists convicted of

37. Bullard, Tad and His Father.
murdering two men during a 1920 robbery. It was for that piece that he won the 1927 Pulitzer Prize.\textsuperscript{39}

Still, even if Bullard had not yet fully focused his writing on Lincoln, as he would in the 1940s, he continued to study the president, earning a reputation as an authority. More specifically, he became known for his knack of puncturing the little myths that bubbled around Lincoln, setting the record straight on various quips and anecdotes that were almost certainly not true.\textsuperscript{40} So assiduous was he at this task, he even corrected one false story he himself had helped create. While Sunday editor for the \textit{Boston Herald}, he ran a story on the Lincoln connection to Adelina Patti. Doubting the story almost as soon as it ran, Bullard discovered, after a great deal of research, that certain details made the story impossible. For the rest of his life he would attempt to correct people who cited to it.\textsuperscript{41} For instance, he wrote a long explanation in a 1950 volume of \textit{Abraham Lincoln Quarterly}: “Practically all the material relating to Adelina Patti in Mr. Barbee’s article (December 1949) is untrue. In ‘the fall of 1862’ she was not in Washington. In the summer of that year up to August 15 she was in London; in November in Paris. She never visited the White House in Civil War time and never sang ‘Home Sweet Home’ for the Lincolns, nor did she ever converse with them about the tour, including Springfield, with Ole Bull.”

But aside from correcting the small errors in the written work of minor authors, Bullard also set the record straight when more important writers in the Lincoln field made mistakes. One of these was Emanuel Hertz, whom Bullard reprimanded for faulty editorial work in his publication of papers in the Herndon Collection.\textsuperscript{42} Another was Carl Sandburg. Bullard went through \textit{The War Years} page by page, with the


\textsuperscript{40} “ Tells of Exploded Lincoln Myths,” \textit{Boston Globe}, February 11, 1929. He was known to give talks and speeches meant to dispel certain romantic notions that had grown up about Lincoln. He also peppered his articles with “fact straightening”—seeming to take great pleasure in noting his erudition on such matters, often patronizingly showing the level of his knowledge and analysis. For example, he started a 1942 article with a brief anecdote. “We may subject this tale to a heavy discount and yet accept it as relatively true,” in “Lincoln’s Conquest of New England.” Or exploding the myth that as a young man on a flatboat, Lincoln shook his hands at a New Orleans slave market, noting, “If I ever get a chance to hit that thing I’ll hit it hard,” Bullard discounted the story as false, though writing, “That some such experience did befall him can hardly be reasonably doubted,” in “Abe Goes down the River.”


\textsuperscript{42} George, “F. Lauriston Bullard,” 273. John Hoffman at the University of Illinois,
same sort of careful eye and meticulous research that he brought to editorial work. Page after page of notes on Sandburg’s mistakes were compiled and circulated, including to both Sandburg’s publisher and the author himself. While criticism of Sandburg was far from unknown, Bullard seemed to relish taking the popular author down a peg.

Sandburg, for his part, reacted generously to the criticism. In April 1940 he wrote to Bullard on Harcourt, Brace, and Company letterhead: “Your memorandum and list of errata in The War Years I have gone through slowly and carefully. I appreciate the labor and the care which you gave this and the spirit of thoroughness, even anxiety, which pervades it.” Sandburg then offered to meet with Bullard on an upcoming trip to Boston, and speak at a meeting of the Lincoln Group, of which Bullard was both founder and president. Despite his polite response, though, Sandburg, who had undoubtedly been piqued by the careful noting of every tiny mistake, closed his letter to Bullard with a subtly delicious retort. “Incidentally, we may then discuss what both printers and typists refer to as ‘the innate depravity (or cussedness) of inanimate things,’ in connection with your having indubitably spelled in your handwriting the name of Buckner correctly, but in the process of copying, the name of Buckner came out Brickner in your typed memorandum.”

Of course, the people Bullard provoked were not limited to the Lincoln field. He was an editorial writer for the Boston Herald—it is fair to say he made a host of powerful and important enemies over the course of his writing career. All of which makes it more mysterious why he was never exposed for his earlier book thefts. His arrest had been covered in all the Boston papers, including the Herald, where he spent most of his career. It is true he changed the way he presented his name—from “Frederic L. Bullard” to “F. Lauriston Bullard.” But his last name was distinct enough that this was, at best, a minor camouflage. And when he started writing for Boston newspapers, it was within a few months of the reporting of his thefts. So a scholar searching Boston papers for evidence of articles by Bullard would almost certainly come across articles about him. But everyone who

in reading the manuscript for this article, let me know that Bullard was far from the only reviewer to correct the errors of Hertz.

43. Lauriston Bullard’s written notes on Carl Sandburg’s The War Years, Boston University Archives, box 23, folder 7. As an example of his attention to detail, here are his first two notes of criticism of volume 1 of The War Years: “Pg. 5—not December 16, December 20,” “Pg. 36—John Hay not 29, but 22 years of age.”

44. Carl Sandburg to Lauriston Bullard, April 16, 1940, Boston University Archives, box 23, folder 7.
later attempted to get a handle on Bullard’s career either failed to connect him with the thefts or simply forgave him the matter, and left it unmentioned.

It is not entirely strange that his *New York Times* or *Boston Herald* obituaries would mention nothing of these troubles, nor would encomiums in the *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* or *Lincoln Herald* be expected to spend a great deal of time on problems. But nothing can explain the omission from the work of the closest thing Bullard had to a biographer, Joseph George. For his 1959 Boston University dissertation, George wrote a thorough and insightful account of Bullard’s career as a Lincoln scholar. This book’s text ran to more than 220 pages, ample space for George to cover the bulk of Bullard’s life, including a great deal of fine detail. But though George offered a brief, pre-1907 account of Bullard’s life, including mentions of the author’s early days and education, he noted only in passing the fourteen years Bullard spent as a minister, and not at all the rare book thefts that brought it to a sudden end. This is particularly strange given that George was critical of Bullard’s obituary writers, most particularly the newspapers, noting they were “disappointing not only in respect to his early career but also regarding his entire life.”

George was guilty of the same thing. The period in Bullard’s life between 1893 and 1907—the time when he began his collecting of books and ephemera—is treated in a mere two sentences: “For a period of fourteen years following his graduation from Yale, Dr. Bullard preached in several Congregational and Presbyterian pulpits. Then in 1907, he began his career as a newspaperman, his profession for the remainder of his active life.”

George, for all intents and purposes, began his story of Bullard in late 1907. He never mentioned why Bullard, well along in starting a family, decided to drop a successful life in the ministry—one he had been working on for close to two decades—to take his chances with the far more risky profession of journalism. There is no evidence Bullard’s abandonment was a crisis of faith of the sort George could be forgiven for not mentioning. In fact, Bullard continued to write for Christian-themed periodicals and on matters of faith. Even if George was not simply curious about the strange move, the fact that he changed professions at all is what made Bullard’s later work possible. That alone should have been reason enough to investigate. His arrest for book

theft was the most significant event in his life as a writer, and it went entirely unremarked upon.

It is fair to say that most people, including those who wrote Bullard’s obituaries or other articles about him, did not know of the thefts. Take, for example, Robert L. Kincaid, who wrote an article on Bullard’s personal library for the *Lincoln Herald* in 1943. For seven pages that alternated between fawning and incredulousness, Kincaid tried to come to grips with how a man of humble means acquired such a gorgeous and comprehensive collection. “Usually great libraries and collections are possible only for men of wealth. It takes time, money, and judgment to build a well-rounded library in a special field. Dr. Bullard insists that his experience illustrates what any man of small means can do provided he knows what he wants and has a considerable endowment of patience and industry.” Also, “Quietly and patiently during his long editorial career he has haunted the bookshops which are prolific in New England.” These sentences read differently depending on what the reader knows of Bullard’s past. Kincaid could not have been so exuberant in his praise, or note how “quietly and patiently” Bullard “haunted” New England bookstores, if he knew of the thefts. He likely could not have written the story at all. Bullard, too, would have been reluctant to participate in such an article if he thought people knew. So it is clear his secret remained safely hidden from almost everyone.47

But Joseph George was another story. He had to know, and simply did not care. Book theft has been treated unevenly by both the American press and the judiciary. Newspapers and judges have treated these thieves harshly at times; at other times, the crimes have gone both unpunished and uncommented-on. Strangely, there is almost a correlation between the two. When a judge takes the crime seriously, so do newspapers. George followed this tradition, taking the crime only as seriously as had others. He was sympathetic to his subject, and likely applied the logic that because there was no conviction, there was no crime. Assuming that the reporting of an arrest might sully an otherwise good man, George left it alone.

Today the story would be different. It is hard to believe that any sort of obituary sketch of Edward Renehan or Barry Landau—historians far less consequential than Bullard—will fail to mention their archives thefts. Certainly a newspaper as thorough as the *New York Times*, if it discusses either man, will not miss this aspect of their records. In

the *Times’s* 2002 obituary for historian Stephen Ambrose, a full paragraph was devoted to his “ethical lapses for having employed some narrative passages in his books that closely paralleled previously published accounts.” The paragraph also mentioned historians Doris Kearns Goodwin and Joseph Ellis for similar ethical lapses. And none of what these historians did rose to the level of an actual crime. If a historian (or a journalist) as prominent as Bullard were today found to be a book thief of this sort, he would not escape with reputation intact. Any retrospective of his life would mention it—if only in passing—and certainly any profile of his fine library would have to explain it away as an aberration, even if the existence of that very collection suggested otherwise.