



Women, Work, and Worship in Lincoln's Country: The Dumville Family Letters

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The Dumville family settled in central Illinois during an era of division and dramatic change. Arguments over slavery raged. Railroads and circuit-riding preachers brought the wider world to the prairie. Irish and German immigrants flooded towns and churches. Anne M. Heinz and John P. Heinz draw from an extraordinary archive at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum to reveal how Ann Dumville and her daughters Jemima, Hephzibah, and Elizabeth lived these times. The letters tell the story of Ann, expelled from her Methodist church for her unshakable abolitionist beliefs; the serious and religious Jemima, a schoolteacher who started each school day with prayer; Elizabeth, enduring hard work as a farmer's wife, far away from the others; and Hephzibah, observing human folly and her own marriage prospects with the same wicked wit. Though separated by circumstances, the Dumvilles deeply engaged one another with their differing views on Methodism, politics, education, technological innovation, and relationships with employers. At the same time, the letters offer a rarely seen look at antebellum working women confronting privation, scarce opportunities, and the horrors of civil war with unwavering courage and faith.

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