

May 2, 1932

Mr. W. H. Townsend  
620 First National Bank Building  
Lexington, Kentucky

Dear Mr. Townsend:

It was pleasant to hear from you again and I am glad you are making a little study of Lincoln and the liquor question. I am always interested to see how people come out who attack that topic.

The point that you raise, that is the exchange of accusation and denial in the Ottawa speech on Lincoln's liquor selling, I have always taken as a very good example of the looseness of the statement of men in political debate. Douglas declares Lincoln to have been, when he first knew him, a "flourishing grocery-keeper." That is rather amusing as it is certain that Lincoln was never flourishing. Moreover, Douglas in his attempt to belittle Lincoln, or to raise at least a question of his early habits, says that he could "drink more liquor than all of the boys of the town together." That I think is the plainest of political exaggeration. There seems to be good evidence that Lincoln never drank at all in those days, chiefly because he did not like liquor, and also because he did not approve of the sort of life it led to in those he saw around him. So far as I have been able to judge he was always temperate in his habits. It was the nature of the man.

Lincoln does not deny the accusation of, <sup>boys</sup> ~~ruining~~ more liquor than all the men in the town when he comes to answer Douglas but he does say that "Lincoln never kept a grocery anywhere in the world," and he goes on to make an admission which from the point of view of today is even more damaging and that is, that he did run a still for a time. I do not remember to have ever heard about this still from any other source. Did you?

I am not sure that we can judge of what was in Lincoln's mind when he used the word "grocery" - the name seems to have been applied pretty generally in those days to what we would call a saloon. Beverage, Vol. I. Page 269 quotes from the

