(He Saw Lincoln Series)

Peter Ford of 961 West William Street, formerly roadmaster on the old Illinois Midland, later the Terre Haute & Peoria railroad, has the distinguished honor of having once had Abraham Lincoln as a passenger in his private car. The car was a hand car, Mr.Ford being at the time track foreman for the Illinois Central.

"It was in 1858" said Mr.Ford. "Daniel H.Elwood, father of the late Frank Elwood, was roadmaster. He directed me to have my hand car at the station in Clinton at a certain time as he would have a passenger for me. The passenger proved to be Abraham Lincoln who was then attorney for the Illinois Central. He wanted to view a piece of property south of Salt Creek, involved in a suit for damaged which had been brought against the railroad. By building the railroad embankment, a pond had been made on the land, owned by Wilse Allen. I had proposed to remedy the matter by draining the pond, but Allen refused to accept this and sued the company.

Lincoln came from Springfield to Clinton by way of Bloomington. There was then no direct railroad line from Clinton to Springfield and it was necessary to come either by way of Decatur or Bloomington. I had the hand car at the station when the train from Bloomington with four men to man it, As the men saw Lincoln coming with the roadmaster, one of them said:"He can't ride on a hand car. His legs are too long." And they were. The old fashioned hand car was not designed for the comfort of passengers. It was made to carry a section crew with their tools and the men usually steadied themselves on the car by holding to the handles and helping pump. If there were more men than might be used in pumping they usually sat on the edge of the platform and let their feet hang over. Lincoln's legs barred him from this position.

The roadmaster and Mr.Lincoln were obliged to stand up which is not exactly safe for an inexperienced man on a rapidly moving hand car. Each had an arm about the other to stabilize themselves. Going down Salt Creek hill with its grade of sixty eight feet to the mile, we were accustomed to get all the speed possbible so that our momentum would help carry us over the other hill. "Better run a little slow Peter", said Mr.Elwood."You might hit one of your low joints and throw us off." He

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winked atme as he said it to soften the reference to a low joint but it was really a wise precaution.

Arriving at the property involved in the law suit, Mr.Lincoln made a few sketches and we returned to Clinton. I was summoned as a witness in the case to testify to having made an offer to Allen to relieve the damage to his property. I met Mr.Lincoln at this trial. I was surprised that he remembered me, addressed me by name and shook hands with me. The railroad company took a change of venue from DeWitt County to Macon where the case would be tried by Judge Charles W. Emerson. The suit never was tried, Allen did not appear when the case was called and it went to the railroad company by default.

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