

[Henry B. Rankin
Lincoln — As This Young Man Knew Him
Personal Recollections of — Rankin

I met Abraham Lincoln for the first time in the Menard County Circuit Court, at Petersburg, Illinois. By favor of my father who was then sheriff of Menard County, I was allowed to stop school during the court's sessions for several years?

Thenceforward for more than a dozen years I met Mr. Lincoln often. The last four years before his election to the Presidency I had close intimacies with the office of Lincoln and Herndon in connections with some of its legal, political and literary activities. The memory of those events now in my seventy-seventh year is recalled with no little degree of personal pleasure. Out of these memories I have been urged to write about a few of Mr. Lincoln's characteristics, and of person, scenes and incidents up to the time he left Springfield for Washington to occupy so prominent a part in our Nation's history, and achieve a world-wide reputation, for all future ages, as the most masterful of men.

This first meeting was in 1847 -- nine years after Mr. Lincoln had left Salem and begun the practice of law in Springfield , as the partner of Col. John T. Stuart. My memory of Mr. Lincoln's personal appearance at that period as I saw him then, forms a picture quite different from that of 1854 and up to 1860, as shown in photographs of the later period. At that earlier date he was in physical prime. He had the plump muscles and color implying an active out of door life, overflowing with physical vigor and health. The angular form, the long sallow face and swarthy complexion of later years do not come back to me, out of the sixty-five years ago of boy-hook memory, printed there in 1847. This period was five years after his marriage to Miss Mary Todd.

I recall Mr. Lincoln's manner towards the people whom he met in that court room, as being quite in contrast with that of other visiting attorneys. His was the manner of one who had come home. Former friends and neighbors met him with a cordiality of welcome as one among and of them still. He was now a rising lawyer and politician visiting former intimate friends, and they showed pride in his success by the hearty fellowship of manner in their greetings.

Notwithstanding Mr. Lincoln's pronounced Whig principles, and the extreme political prejudices existing between the Whig and Democratic parties of that time, his personality, wit, humor and side-splitting stories held . fifteen years before, when he made his first printed appeal to them on March 9, 1832, as a candidate for the legislature, and received the entire vote of the Salem-Petersburg precinct, with only three exceptions.
