

A class of legal work which Lincoln enjoyed particularly was that in which mechanical or mathematical problems were involved. In his youthful pot-boiling profession of surveying he never lost interest and would go out himself to make sure of boundaries if a client's case required particular investigation. Indeed he was generally recognised by his fellow lawyers as an authority in surveying, and as late as 1859 his opinion on a disputed question was sought by a convention of surveyors meeting in Springfield. # One of the finest cases involving mechanical problems which Lincoln ever argued was that of the Rock Island Bridge. It was not however the mechanics involved which made it striking. The case was a dramatic episode in the war long waged by the Mississippi againsy the plains beyond. For decades the river had been the willing burden-bearer of the West. Now, however, the railroad had come. The Rock Island Road had even dared to bridge the river to carry over her traffic which she claimed.

In May 1856, a steamboat struck one of the piers of the bridge was wrecked and burned, one pier of the bridge was also destroyed. The boat company sued the railroad. The suit was the beginning of the long and violent struggle between St. Louis and Chicago for commercial supremacy. In Chicago it was commonly believed that the St. Louis Chamber of Commerce had the captain of the boat to run onto the pier, and it was said that when the bridge burned the steamer gathered near and whistled for joy.

The case was felt to involve the future course of Western commerce and when it was called in Sept. 1857 at Chicago people crowded there from all over the west. Normand D. Judd afterwards

A fac-simile of the opinion given by Lincoln at this time is published in McClure's "Early Life of Abraham Lincoln," p. 216.

so prominent in the politics of the state was the attorney of the road and he engaged ~~amongst the~~ Lincoln.

Among others as counsel Lincoln made an address to the jury which those who remember it declare to have been one of his strongest legal arguments.

"The two points relied upon by the opponents of the bridge," says Judge Blodgett of Chicago:

1st. That the river was the great water way for the Commerce of the valley and could not legally be obstructed by a bridge.

2nd. That this particular bridge was so located with interference to the channel of the river at that point as to make it a peril to all water craft navigating the river, and an unnecessary obstruction to navigation.

The first proposition had not at that time been directly passed upon by the Supreme Court of the United States, although the Wheeling Bridge case involved the question, but the court had evaded a decision upon it, by holding that the Wheeling bridge was so low as to be an unnecessary obstruction to the use of the river by steamboats. The discussion of the ~~Bridge Company~~ first proposition on the part of the Bridge Company devolved mainly upon Mr. Abraham Lincoln.

I listened with much interest to his argument on this point, and while I was not impressed by it as a specially eloquent effort (as the word eloquent is generally understood) I have always considered it as one of the ablest efforts I ever heard from Mr. Lincoln at the bar. His illustrations were apt and forcible, his statements clear and logical, and his reasons in favor of the policy (and necessarily the right) to bridge the river and thereby encourage the settlement and building up of the vast area

of fertile country to the west of it were broad and statesman like.

The pith of his argument was in his statement that one man had as good a right to cross a river as another had to sail up or down it. That these were equal and mutual rights which must be exercised so as not to interfere with each other, like the right to cross a street or highway and the right to pass along it. From this undeniable right to cross the river he then ~~pro~~ proceeded to discuss the means for crossing. Must it always be by canoe or ferry-boat? Must the products of all the boundless futile country lying west of the river for all time be compelled to stop on its western bank be unloaded from the cars and loaded upon a boat and after the transit across the river, be reloaded into cars on the other side to continue their journey east? In this connection he drew a vivid ~~sketched~~ picture of the future of the great west lying beyond the river, and argued that the of common demanded that bridges across the river must be a conceded right, ~~that~~ which the steamboat interests ought not to be allowed to successfully resist, and thereby stay the progress of development and civilization in the region to the west.

While I cannot recall a word or sentence of the argument I will remember its effect on all who listened to it, and the decision of the court fully sustained the right to bridge so long as it did not unnecessarily obstruct navigation.