

## ILLUSTRATIONS

### CHAPTER XVIII

#### 1837 - Lincoln's First Big Year

- I **Lincoln in 1860.** From an ambrotype taken in Springfield, Ill., in August 1860, and presented by Mr. Lincoln to J. Henry Brown, a miniature artist, who had just finished painting Mr. Lincoln's portrait on ivory. This miniature is now owned by Mr. Robert T. Lincoln. An engraving made from it by Samuel Sartain in 1860 had a wide circulation.
- II **Former State Capitol at Vandalia, Ill., now used as a court house.**

When Vandalia became convinced in the winter of 1835-1836 that she was in danger of losing the capital, a few of her citizens, in order to remove the objection that there was no proper official building in the town, on their own responsibility and out of their own pockets, built a new capitol. Into its construction went whatever materials they could salvage from the brick building which had formerly been used, and also, it is said, without leave, a large quantity of timber, etc., which had been sent to the district by the United States Government to be used in the bridges for the national road which was then under construction. When built, this was the finest public building in Illinois. Unfortunately, some years ago, the pillars shown in the illustration above were replaced by elaborate iron construction. There is now a movement on foot in Vandalia to restore the building. (See "Early Life" for picture of capitol)
- III **Lincoln's first Professional Card.**

Lincoln's name first appears among the list of lawyers announcing themselves in the "Sangamo Journal" of Springfield on April 12, 1837. As the card shows, his partner was Major J. T. Stuart. (See p. 315, McClure's Magazine, March, 1896)
- IV **Office Chair of Stuart & Lincoln.**

This chair is now in the Oldroyd Collection, Washington, D.C.
- V **Page from Stuart & Lincoln's fee book of 1837.**

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Illustrations - Chapter XVIII, Cont'd

These entries in Lincoln's hand show how modest the fees were at the period, also that they were sometimes, at least partly, "traded out." (P. 319, McClure's Magazine, March 1896)

- VI Silhouette of Elijah Parish Lovejoy. *anti-slavery*  
Elijah Lovejoy was killed November 7, 1837 in Alton, Ill., in an attack by a mob on the building where he carried on his business. Mr. Lovejoy had had *four* ~~four~~ presses destroyed by mobs in Alton before his murder. Twenty years later, Lincoln wrote of this event: "Lovejoy's tragic death for freedom in every sense marked his sad ending as the most important single event that ever happened in the new world." (p. 312, McClure's Magazine, March 1896)
- VII The above picture was used as a frontispiece of a little book published in 1838 on the trial at Alton of the persons engaged in the riot of November 7, 1837 - the riot in which Elijah Lovejoy lost his life. The jury returned a verdict of not guilty. (p. 314, McClure's Magazine, March 1896)
- VIII Extract in Lincoln's hand from a speech by Henry Clay, made in 1826. This speech was made in support of Clay's scheme for negro colonization - a scheme which it is probable Lincoln followed closely and sympathetically from its inception. He was familiar at this time, 1837, with Clay's position on the slavery question and heartily supported it. The above quotations were used by him in a eulogy of Clay made in 1852 in Springfield.

## IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

### Chapter XVIII

#### 1837 - Lincoln's First Big Year

The first Big Year in Abraham Lincoln's life was 1837. It was then that he first proved his skill as a political leader, was admitted to the bar, began to make speeches that were preserved, and, most important of all, demonstrated that he had the moral courage to side openly with what he believed to be the right of an issue on which the whole country was divided.

Active as he was, he was by no means free from melancholy. The shadow of Ann Rutledge's death still hung over him. More than one of his friends in the Assembly in the sessions that followed her death in the summer of 1835 have recalled how quiet he was, how many evenings he left the group in the tavern to spend with some thoughtful friend. The most interesting of the reminiscences of these winters in Vandalia has come to us only recently in a series of letters and fugitive memoranda from the Rev. James Lemen, a minister well known in Illinois up to his death in 1870 at the age of eighty-three.

Mr. Lemen was a son of that stalwart anti-slavery leader, the Rev. James Lemen, Sr., who came to <sup>Illinois</sup> in 1786 as a confidential agent of Thomas Jefferson, charged with building up anti-slavery sentiment in the North-western territory. During all the years

after the Ordinance of 1787 made this territory free, James Lemen fought the strong factions in Illinois and Indiana which repeatedly petitioned Congress to repeal the anti-slavery articles of the Ordinance. In 1809, at Jefferson's request, he founded an anti-slavery branch of the Baptist church and later the Illinois Anti-slavery League - powerful influences in finally saving the State to freedom against an opposition whose strength it is very hard for us to realize today.

James Lemen, Sr. had six sons, all of whom became, like their father, Baptist preachers. It was with one of these, his namesake, that Lincoln became intimate in Vandalia, and their friendship continued in his life in Springfield. Mr. Lemen wrote his recollections of this acquaintance years ago for his family, but, so far as I know, no part of it was published before 1915. In these notes he says:

"My period of public service in early and later Illinois, and my travels as a gospel minister, which covered a period of more than fifty years, gave me a more or less intimate acquaintance with nearly every public man in the state within that period, and none of them impressed me more favorably than Abraham Lincoln, from the first time I met him in Vandalia, in 1837, when he was a member of the legislature. Generally, with strangers, Mr. Lincoln was secretive and shy, but, from some cause, we formed very strong attachments at our very first meeting, which steadily increased during his lifetime. My business at Vandalia that winter kept me there several weeks, and, both boarding at the same place, Mr. Lincoln and I were thrown together a great deal. Generally, for three nights every week, he was at my rooms until midnight, and certainly no one was more welcome. The members of the legislature said they could not see why he made a companion

of me as I was a preacher, and he cared but little for religion; but they were in error, as his conversations were chiefly on the Scriptures and related subjects, and I believe at every meeting I held on Sundays, in town or adjacent settlements while there, Mr. Lincoln was present.

"At later periods I was frequently at Springfield on business or duty, and there Lincoln spent three or four evenings, generally at my rooms, every week, and he certainly could not have enjoyed our meetings any more than I did. While there I generally preached every Sunday in town or country, and Lincoln was nearly always present, although, ordinarily, he was not a regular church attendant. There was a constitutional trait, or characteristic about Mr. Lincoln, that colored nearly all of his life, and that was a settled form of melancholy, sometimes very marked, and sometimes very mild, but always sufficient to tinge his countenance with a shade of sadness unless a smile should dispel it, which frequently happened, as he enjoyed humor and often indulged in it. On matters spiritual, like the philosophical old apostle, Thomas, he was sometimes inclined to doubt, though to no greater extent than thousands of church member Christians. But frequently he seemed to crave a stronger belief in the Bible truths, and on one occasion of that kind at Springfield, he spent a whole night with me conversing on Scriptural matters, and at times we engaged in prayer, and finally he declared our meetings had restored his feelings to a better state of confidence, and that his doubts were subdued. At that stage he made a most beautiful prayer, which so impressed me, that after its conclusion I asked him if he could repeat it, which he did, and I wrote it down and preserved a copy of it. This was in 1856, and was our last meeting."

Mr. Lemen's reminiscences of Mr. Lincoln might be, at least partially, discredited by critical students, knowing how easy it is for those who "remember" in latter years to exaggerate, if we did not have a corroboration of these meetings from Mr. Lincoln himself. This comes in a letter written by him to Mr. Lemen in 1857 - a letter which appears in none of the "complete" editions of Lincoln's letters, and never was printed at all, so far as I

knew, until 1915, when it appeared in a pamphlet entitled "The Jefferson-Lamen Compact," containing all the details of the interesting and important anti-slavery undertaking to which I referred above. In this letter Mr. Lincoln says: "The memory of our many 'evening sittings' here and elsewhere, as we called them, suggests many a pleasant hour, both pleasant and helpful."

We have here what seems to me to be conclusive evidence that at this period Mr. Lincoln was taking a deep and serious interest in religious matters - an entirely different view of his attitude of mind from that with which William H. Herndon and Ward Lamen in their biographies credit him.

However deep in melancholy Lincoln may often have sunk in 1837, it did not interfere with either his political or his professional activities. And this is true of all those periods of gloom through which he went at different times and which have been interpreted by certain of his biographers as periods of practical insanity. A man who goes on with his work regularly and intelligently through a time of moral and mental absement and despair is not a crazy man. And Lincoln always did this. At the time of Ann Rutledge's death, as we have already seen, it was only when he was absolutely prostrated by "chills and fever" that he gave up. As soon as that illness had abated, he went about his business. It was so at this time. Quiet and

brooding as he was, he was still able to conduct to a successful issue the most spirited bit of political work that the Assembly of Illinois had seen in its twenty-seven years of life. This was the campaign by which the capital was taken away from Vandalia and transferred to the town to which Lincoln was to move - Springfield, the county seat of Sangamon County.

As one goes about Vandalia today and reviews its early history in company with the fine group of leaders there who are so eager to preserve everything of its early history, one cannot but sympathize with their loss of the capital, inevitable as it was. As a matter of fact, it was recognized in 1829 when Vandalia was chosen as the capital that it might soon prove to be too far south for the convenience of the State. Accordingly the legislature passed an act, saying that at the end of twenty years the capital might be <sup>changed</sup> moved, if it was so desired. In anticipation of the expiration of this period a vote was taken in 1833. There were six contestants at that time, the geographical centre of the State, Jacksonville, Springfield, Alton, Vandalia and Peoria. Alton won.

They tell you in Vandalia today how stirred the town was when it realized its loss. "We will hold them," a few of the citizens said. "We will build a capitol ourselves, so fine they won't leave." And in the summer of 1837, two or three

citizens, largely out of their own pockets, <sup>although aided by</sup> ~~together with the~~ materials which could be filched from the stores the United States Government had collected in the vicinity for building bridges over the national highway, put up what was, for that time, the finest public building in Illinois, the building which is really the pride of Vandalia today, although, unhappily, it has been "improved" by later well intentioned but mistaken groups of citizens.

In this building, now the County Court House, they show you the Assembly room in which Lincoln sat, and where there went on the lively fight that he, as the head of the Sangamon County delegation, conducted in the effort to secure the capital for Springfield. Here he did his persuading, haranguing, "log rolling." Here is the window, they tell you, from which he once jumped, to break up a quorum.

According to Mr. Herndon, it was four years later and in the capitol at Springfield that Mr. Lincoln executed this manœuvre, though, indeed, I do not know why he should not have jumped from windows in two different capitols! If it would win a point, we may be sure he did! So let Vandalia stick to her tradition!

At all events, he won out as leader in this fight for removing the capital to Springfield. Vandalia's fine new capitol building proved to be a mausoleum for her hopes. Today she contents herself with reminiscences, and although there is a long

list of men of fine calibre and achievement connected with her early history, her chief pride is in the fact that here Abraham Lincoln spent five winters of his life.

Directly after the close of this session in which Lincoln had distinguished himself as a political leader he moved to Springfield. It was less a wrench for him to leave New Salem after his six years there because New Salem was moving out herself - moving root and branch to Petersburg, a mile or two down the Sangamon - a town which in 1836 Lincoln himself had surveyed and to which he had, in the course of his "log rolling" for the capital, secured the extension of the road from Springfield. Petersburg's absorption of New Salem was the victory of the prairie over the bluff. The settlers had learned that the prairie could be made livable, that here was the wealth; they had learned, too, the difficulty of keeping up roads in towns situated as New Salem was - a difficulty obvious to visitors today.

There has always been a tendency to emphasize Lincoln's forlornness in making this move, but, as a matter of fact, he was stepping into a position superior to that which most young lawyers of twenty-eight have when they start in a new place, for Springfield, if a new home, was by no means a strange place to him. For three years now he had held a position in its land office and been constantly in the town. For three years he had been one of the representatives of the county at the State Assembly. It is safe to venture that there were not many men in Springfield that he did not

know. Moreover, most of these men were friendly to him, friendly because they had confidence in his integrity and in his ability. He came, too, fresh from the laurels that he had won at Vandalia. Springfield was grateful to him and to all the delegation, known in Illinois history as the "Long Nine," because no one of them was less than six feet in height; and all that summer barbecues and celebrations were given through the county to the delegation "as demonstrations of approbation for their course in the legislature." I have before me a communication from Athens, describing one of these affairs, with a list of twenty-six different toasts, one of them by "A. Lincoln" and at least three of them in his honor.

Lincoln was lucky in having a friend in Springfield with whom he could live - a friend who for several years now was to be the confidant of his always troubled heart, Joshua F. Speed. He was fortunate, too, in having a position in a law firm at once offered him. Major John T. Stuart, whom Lincoln himself credits with having encouraged him to study law, now took him in, and their card appears first in the "Sangamo Journal" on April 12, 1837.

That he was a real partner we have evidence from their fee book, fac-simile of extracts from which have been published at various times. In the entries for April of the year Lincoln went up to Springfield there is no fee higher than five dollars, though a little later we have one of fifty. It seems, however, to have been exceptional; but if fees were low, so were expenses. Mr. Charles W. Moores of Indianapolis, who under the title of

"The Career of a Country Lawyer" has made one of the best studies of Lincoln's legal life which we have, unearthed a few years ago a number of interesting entries showing both the modesty of the fees and the modesty of the cost of living.

While unquestionably the connection with Stuart was a fine thing for Lincoln, he being a man of good breeding and education as well as of high standing in the community, Lincoln was a partner ~~sure to draw business~~. Practically every one in Sangamon County was his friend and his reputation for honesty was such as to attract business. *ms -*

The most significant thing in this Big Year, however, is by all odds the position Lincoln then took on the slavery question. To understand what he did we must recall the agitation at this particular moment, North and South. Anti-slavery sentiment was becoming more and more formidable through <sup>increased</sup> organization, and the multiplication of organs. The South was mightily stirred - and with reason. In the South as well as in the North, anti-slavery sentiment was making its way. That is, more and more people were doing as Edward Cole, Governor of Illinois from 1823 to 1826, had done in 1819, leaving slave territory and freeing their slaves. The seepage from runaway slaves was increasing, and there was a disposition stirring in the North to protect the runaways. The South was determined that the agitation should be stopped, and in this determination it had the backing of the conservative North. State after state passed resolutions at this time similar to those that

the Illinois Assembly passed in this year of 1837.

"Resolved, That we highly disapprove of the formation of Abolition societies, and of the doctrines promulgated by them."

"That the right of property in slaves is sacred to the slave-holding States by the Federal Constitution, and that they cannot be deprived of that right without their consent."

"That the General Government cannot abolish slavery in the District of Columbia against the consent of the citizens of said District, without a manifest breach of good faith."

"That the governor be requested to transmit to the States of Virginia, Alabama, Mississippi, New York and Connecticut a copy of the foregoing report and resolutions."

Lincoln refused to vote for these resolutions. He agreed that Congress had no power to interfere with the institution of slavery in the different states. He differed with the Assembly, however, as to the power to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, thought that it did have that, though it should only be exercised if the people of the District requested it. His real objection to the resolutions was founded on his belief that no public expression on slavery should go out without a declaration that the thing was wrong. The protest <sup>on this point</sup> which he wrote then, and which he could find only one other member of the Assembly to join him in signing, read:

"They believe that the institution of slavery is founded on both injustice and bad policy, but that the promulgation of abolition doctrine tends rather to increase than abate its evils."

Nine months after Lincoln turned in this protest there happened seventy-five miles or so from Springfield, in the town of Alton on the Mississippi river, a town which Lincoln undoubtedly knew well enough, a tragedy which tremendously stirred him. Alton was a lively town and in the main sympathizing <sup>ed</sup> frankly with slavery - sympathizing <sup>ed</sup> so much that <sup>when</sup> early in this year, the Rev. Elijah P. Lovejoy, an active abolitionist editor, who had recently been driven out of St. Louis, set up his press there, they promptly threw it into the river. One after another three presses which Lovejoy brought on were destroyed, and then finally, in November, a mob, learning that he was starting a fourth press, raided the

building and before the riot was ended, had killed Lovejoy.

How deep a hold this affair really had on Lincoln we had no direct evidence until his letter to the Rev. James Lemen, to which I referred above, was published in 1915. In this letter he says; "Lovejoy's tragic death for freedom in every sense marked his sad ending as the most important single event that ever happened in the new world."

This extraordinary statement made by a man so careful in his use of words as Lincoln almost invariably was, seems to me to show the depth of the effect the tragedy had had upon him. He goes on in this letter to draw a comparison between Lemen's and Lovejoy's work exceedingly interesting in itself and also because of the parallel he makes from the Scriptures:

"Both your father and Lovejoy were pioneer leaders in the cause for freedom, and it has always been difficult for me to see why your father, who was a resolute, uncompromising, and aggressive leader, who boldly proclaimed his purpose to make both the territory and the state free, never aroused nor encountered any of that mob violence which both in St. Louis and Alton confronted or pursued Lovejoy, and which finally doomed him to a felon's death and a martyr's crown. Perhaps the two cases are a little parallel with those of John and Peter. John was bold and fearless at the scene of the Crucifixion, standing near the cross receiving the Savior's request to care for his mother, but was not annoyed; while Peter, whose disposition to shrink from public view, seemed to catch the attention of members of the mob on every hand, until finally to throw public attention off, he denied his master with an oath; though later the grand old apostle redeemed himself grandly, and like Lovejoy, died a martyr to his faith. Of course, there was no similarity between Peter's treachery at the Temple and Lovejoy's splendid courage when the pitiless mob were closing around him. But in the cases of the two apostles at the scene mentioned, John was more

prominent or loyal in his presence and attention to the Great Master than Peter was, but the latter seemed to catch the attention of the mob; and as Lovejoy, one of the most inoffensive of men, for merely printing a small paper, devoted to the freedom of the body and mind of man, was pursued to his death; while his elder comrade in the cause of freedom, Rev. James Lemen, Sr., who boldly and aggressively proclaimed his purpose to make both the territory and the state free, was never molested a moment by the minions of violence. The madness and pitiless determination with which the mob steadily pursued Lovejoy to his doom, marks it as one of the most unreasoning and unreasonable in all time, except that which doomed the Savior to the cross."

Some three months after Lovejoy's death, Lincoln delivered his first formal lecture, so far as I know. This was for the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield, a club which he had helped organize soon after he moved into the town. The lecture was published at the request of the club by the "Sangamo Journal." It has the pretentious title of "The Perpetuation of our Political Institutions." It is really an argument against violence as a political method. The Mississippi country had been rioting for a year or two. At Vicksburg only a short time before a group of professional gamblers had been hanged by a mob. This had been the first of a series of terrible deeds. As Lincoln reviews them: "negroes suspected of conspiring to raise an insurrection" were caught up and hanged in all parts of the State; then white men supposed to be leagued with the negroes; and finally, strangers from neighboring States, going thither on business, were in many instances subjected to the same fate. Thus went on this process of hanging, from gamblers to negroes, from negroes to white citizens, and from

these to strangers, till dead men were seen literally dangling from the boughs of trees upon every roadside. . . "

Soon after this a negro had been burned in St. Louis. "This story is very short," Lincoln said, "and is perhaps the most highly tragic of anything of its length that has ever been witnessed in real life."

Then had come the affair at Alton. Lincoln's rehearsal of these affairs, of the danger they were to freedom, sounds very modern. Indeed, his argument might stand today if its illustrations were brought up to date. He brings it down to an important point, that if this "mobocratic spirit" went on unchecked, it must inevitably end, in a government constituted like ours, in breaking down what, he declared, was its strongest bulwark, and that was the attachment of the people.

"I know the American people are much attached to their government," he said. "I know they would suffer much for its sake; I knew they would endure evils long and patiently before they would ever think of exchanging it for another, - yet, notwithstanding all this, if the laws be continually despised and disregarded, if their rights to be secure in their persons and property are held by no better tenure than the caprice of a mob, the alienation of their affections from the government is the natural consequence; and to that, sooner or later, it must come."

Here we have him, then, at the beginning of his career, the first year in which he really had his feet on the ground as a politician and a lawyer, putting himself down boldly on the most difficult question the country has ever had to face. He went out of his way, both in the legislature and in a public lecture, to make clear his position, at a time when a protest, even of that character, might be almost fatal to his ambitions. It was to be ten years before events were to force him again to state his convictions; in the meantime life was to bring him many new experiences, some disappointing, some happy, the most important of these unquestionably being his marriage, five years after his first Big Year, and that marriage will be the subject of our next chapter.