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By H. C. Whitney (see p. 13)

HISTORY OF THE FIRST "ANTI-NEBRASKA" CONVENTION IN ILLINOIS.

The first "Anti-Nebraska" Convention met at Bloomington on May 29th, 1856, it being the convention which organized the Republican party in Illinois, and which also nominated William H. Bissell for Governor, and Abraham Lincoln as one of the presidential electors at large.

It was designed, by this Convention, to inaugurate a new party, really, from the debris of the Whig party - the callow abolitionist party - and that Segment of the Democratic party which had a responsive and awakened conscience. Lincoln was to appear as a delegate from Sangamon County, and although he was very cautious and conservative at that time, he became, before the convention concluded its labors, the most important person connected with that incipient movement.

Judge Davis resided at Bloomington, but was, at the time, holding Court at Danville, and he invited Mr. Lincoln, Archibald Williams, Judge Dickey and myself to become guests of his family during the sitting of the Convention. He did not expect to be, and was not, in fact, at home, although Nicolay, in his elaborate History, states it otherwise.

Lincoln was to go direct from Danville Court to Bloomington via Decatur, and the day previously he and I agreed that I should meet him at Tolono and accompany him. We adhered to this plan, and stopping at Decatur at supper time, put up at a hotel, there being no train north till next morning.

The reason why Lincoln did this, rather than go to his home 40 miles distant, which he could have done quite as well, was to avoid running the gauntlet of Stuart, the Edwardes, Butter, etc. They were opposed to this movement, which, it must be confessed was a parish among politicians then; and would, as he believed, have tried to dissuade Lincoln from engaging in it: and as he had not been at home since his name had been coupled with the movement: no opportunity had theretofore been given and he shrewdly designed there should be none. We did not while there meet a single chance acquaintance, altho' this was in the County where Lincoln had resided, and where he was alleged to have split the historic rails. After supper, we walked to the public Square, and standing a few feet west of the then existing Court House, Lincoln, after shifting his position two or three times, said partly to himself and partly to me: "Here, on this spot, twenty-six years ago, I stood by our wagon, which contained all that my

"father and I owned in the world: this isn't six feet from the exact spot." He added: "I have frequently since, tried to locate the route by which we came here, but the nearest I have been able to determine about it is, that it was near to the present Illinois Central Rail Road." Said I: "Did you then ever expect to be a lawyer, and practice in the Court House here?"

"No," he drily replied, "I didn't know that I had sense enough to be a lawyer then." We walked till bed time, during which he told me of his early adventures in both Mason and Sangamon Counties; also of his early struggles in life there. When we ~~we~~ took the train the next morning, Lincoln was extremely anxious to ascertain if there were any delegates on board enroute to the Convention. He requested me to make inquiry in that direction of the few passengers, which I declined: so Lincoln himself went to the forward end of the car, and gazed through the list as he paced slowly back to where I sat deeply engaged with "The Howaji in Syria." I really would like to know if any of those men are from down south, going to the convention," said he. "I don't see any harm in asking them," I replied. "I believe I will," said he, at last; and he left me to perform his errand. In fifteen or twenty minutes he came back, his face radiant with happiness; he had found

two delegates from Marion County. The point was this: Southern Illinois was thoroughly hostile to "black republican" ideas; and Lincoln's hope was to discern any sentiment down there in that line. It will be recollected by many that one solitary vote was cast for Fremont in Johnson County; but in the large majority of counties in Logan's district, not a single vote was cast against Buchanan.

Judge Davis' house was but a few yards from the Illinois Central depot; and on going there, neither of the others had arrived, but when we came to tea in the afternoon we found Judge Dickey, who had preceded us a short time, Mr. Williams not arriving till the night train.

After dinner, Lincoln proposed that I should go with him to the Chicago & Alton depot, in another part of the town, to see who might arrive from Chicago. On our way Lincoln stopped in at a very diminutive jewelry shop, where he bought his first pair of spectacles for $37\frac{1}{2}$ cents; he then remarking to me that he had got to be forty-seven years old, and "kinder" needed them. As we approached the depot we found ourselves to be late, and that the omnibuses were just starting away, full of passengers, several of whom at once recognized and called out to Lincoln.

As we turned to retrace our steps, Lincoln said to me sotto voce, but enthusiastically: "That's the best sign yet; Judd is there; and he's a trimmer."

It must be borne in mind that our convention was as yet but an experiment, and it was not definitely known how successful it would become. Judd was afterward an applicant for the position of Secretary of the Interior under Lincoln; and was in fact made Minister to Prussia.

Throughout all the various steps preceding and during the entire work of the convention, Lincoln was active, alert energetic and enthusiastic. I never saw him more busily engaged, more energetically at work, or with his mind and heart so thoroughly enlisted.

Judge Davis's house was a half mile from the focus of political action, and thus out of the whirl of excitement. Archibald Williams slept with Lincoln, and both he and Dickey were extremely conservative Whigs, and had great influence over Mr. Lincoln. The public mind every where was in a feverish and excited condition, and this unwholesome state of affairs was emphasized in the minds of the peoples representatives, who were assembled at this convention. Lawrence, in the State of Kansas

had just theretofore been attacked and the "Free State" hotel and two printing offices destroyed; Governor Robinson, the "Free State" Governor of Kansas, had been arrested in Missouri without legal warrant, as he was endeavoring to escape from mob violence - his house sacked and fired - and himself chained out in the prairie, in default of a jail. James S. Emery, a prominent "Free State" leader and Mrs. Governor Robinson were at Bloomington, arousing and intensifying the indignation: Governor Reeder, who had just escaped from Kansas in disguise, was also there: and all three, of necessity as well as from design, excited and emphasized the deep feelings of indignation then already prevalent. Sumner had, just one week previously, been beaten into insensibility by "bully" Brooks, and was reported to be dying: and information had just come, that Senator Trumbull had offered a Resolution in the Senate, having for its aim, the prevention of civil war, and the restoration of peace to Kansas: which Resolution had been treated with derision by Douglas and those of his political complexion. Lovejoy and the abolitionists were urging extreme measures and resolutions, which the Kansas colony fomented, and the street and lobby talk was all in the direction of extreme radicalism.

Foot Note): While O. H. Browning was making an excellent speech in the convention the crowd kept interrupting by calling for Lovejoy, and the former was obliged to yield the floor. They wanted something very radical and Lovejoy filled the bill.

In the seclusion and privation of our temporary home, Lincoln, Williams and Dickey discussed the situation earnestly, and contemplated the jarring elements with deep and earnest solicitude, all harmonizing in favor of conservative counsels; and they did more than all others combined in shaping the moderate and conservative course which was finally adopted in and by the Convention.

The general sentiment undoubtedly was in favor of most radical expressions; but owing chiefly to Williams's and Lincoln's admonitions a moderate course was adopted; and the following (among others) Resolutions was adopted chiefly upon Lincoln's suggestion:

"Resolved: That we hold, in accordance with the opinions and
 "practices of all the great Statesmen of all parties for the past
 "Sixty years of the administration of the government under the Con-
 "stitution, Congress possesses full power to prohibit slavery in
 "the territories; and that while we will maintain all constitutional
 "rights of the South, we also hold that justice, humanity, the
 "principles of freedom as expressed in our Declaration of Inde-
 "pendence and our National Constitution, and the purity and

"perpetuity of our Government require that that form should be exerted to prevent the extension of Slavery into territory heretofore."

Lincoln stated the situation to Judd and Wentworth thus:

"Your party is so mad with Douglas that it will gulp down anything, but our (Whig) folks are from Kentucky, and will not be forced into radical measures: the Abolitionists must go with us, anyhow: they can do nothing else; and your ring of the Democratic party, the same: but the Whigs hold the balance of power and will be hard to manage, anyway you take it. Why (said he) I had a hard time to hold Dubois when he found Lovejoy and Coddington here: he insisted upon going home at once."

Governor Reeder was quite a lion to the multitude, but no lion to Lincoln. The latter, Williams and myself were going to our rooms in the evening, from the Pike House, when we passed a crowd listening to Reeder in the Court House Square. We listened but for a moment: "He can't overcome us," Williams grimly said: "He would have a hard time to explain things to me," responded Lincoln, as we turned away: in fact, Lincoln did not meet Reeder at all. Lincoln and Dickey strode ahead, Williams and I following: after a while, we heard Lincoln's shrill voice calling through

the darkness, "Williams! Where are you and Whitney?" "Here, arm in arm;" shouted Williams. "Is it the blind leading the blind?" came back. But that same shrill voice had a magical power, the next day and is still calling through the long procession of years, which will stretch into centuries. Next morning, the Convention assembled in Majors Hall and organized temporarily by electing Williams as Chairman, immediately after which, and out of order, on motion of a delegate from Edgar, Colonel Bissell was nominated for Governor by the wildest acclamation. A list of Counties was then called for credentials which included Lincoln's name with the Sangamon delegation. When Lawrence County was called, no response came. The Secretary was proceeding with the call, when Lincoln arose, and anxiously looking all around, said: "Mr Chairman, let Lawrence County be called again: there's a delegate in town from there, and a very good man he is, too." The call was repeated but no reply came. The delegate whose courage failed him, at the last moment in presence of the Abolitionist contingent ~~r~~ was Jesse M. Dubois, father of the Senator of that name from Idaho; he came indeed as a delegate; but finding Lovejoy and other abolitionists there as cherished delegates, he, through indignation or timidity, stayed away for the time being. A

committee on permanent organization and one on Resolutions were appointed, when we adjourned for dinner.

On ~~assembling~~xxx reassembling, John M. Palmer (now U.S. Senator) was chosen as permanent Chairman. When he made a speech, in which he made profert of his Democracy thus: "I have always voted a straight Democratic ticket: I first voted for Matty Van: then I voted for James K. Polk in 1844, and I voted for General Cass in 1848, and in 1852 -- let me see" (said he humorously) "who I voted for in 1852." (Voices, "Frank Pierce.") "Well," (said he) "you may make the charge, but you can't make me own it."

There was a vigorous contest over the Resolutions: they were not radical enough for the abolitionists, and some violent speeches were made in opposition, but they were adopted substantially as reported. Then came the speeches, the first being by Orville H. Browning of Quincy, then came Owen Lovejoy, the next that I recollect was Dick Yates (after Governor and Senator) James S. Emery of Kansas was heralded in this way by a delegate: "Mr. Chairman, there's a man in back here from Lawrence, and I reckon from appearance, ~~his~~ he's got a heap of good talk in him" -- (voices name! name!!) "Emery!" -- (voices "Emery! Emery!!") And Emery presented himself and presented the woes and mongs of the

"Free State" people in a graphic and eloquent style that made our blood almost boil. Then arose a deafening shout for "Abraham Lincoln!" And the majestic Lincoln never shone out to better advantage; but he first calmed the tremendous agitation which permeated the whole audience: then took the Convention captive by his masterly way of putting the case - changing the notions and necessarily fleeting ebullition of feeling into a fixed and emphatic resolve.

It was the greatest and most effective speech of his life, so far as the effect on his immediate audience was concerned: men who most ~~1/2~~ rarely ever had a spasm of emotion like Judd, Peck or Washburn were as mad and wild as the rest. The scene on that afternoon reminded me of scenes I have witnessed on the New York gold board, when excitement was most intense and fortunes were changing hands each few seconds. I usually am phlegmatic, but I was as weak as the rest then. John L. Scripps, Billy Herndon and myself, each for himself, tried to take notes. I succeeded measurably -- they failed ignominiously. As soon as I reached Judge Davis house and in the presence of Lincoln, Williams and Dickey, who were discussing some of its features, I enlarged my notes. They are very imperfect, and some of the talk at Judge

Davis's may have become entangled with it; but such as it is (and it is the best now attainable) I bestow it on the public. Some of the exact language is that of Lincoln; also γ its general tenor; but most of the detail is necessarily mine.

(Foot Note): I may state that I also have incorporated Judge Cunningham's recollections on some points and thus improved while the Judge recollects much of the speech as I have reported it.

(Foot Note): I notice that a late writer makes the usually accurate and well informed Joseph Medill say that the Convention was held in a church and that Lincoln spoke from its pulpit. This is an error, and doubtless Mr. Medill never authorized the statement. Lincoln arose to speak, either from his seat in the body of the hall, or from the side of the broad platform (I forget which) and being earnestly importuned advanced to the center and front of the platform. There was no pulpit nor desk: he stood visible to all. Neither did Lincoln say, as attributed to him: "A few of us got together in my office on yesterday." In fact, I had been with Lincoln nearly every day and night for three weeks before that and not anywhere near Springfield. Neither was Davis and Trumbull then, as Nicolay and Hay state.

The convention adjourned a few minutes later; and, as I passed down-stairs with the crowd, Jesse K. Dubois (who had been afraid to respond to the roll-call of counties, but who came in later, and was nominated for State Auditor), seized me by the arm with a painful grip and made an exclamation to me close to my ear, which I soon afterward repeated to Lincoln.

Of course he was the lion of the hour; everybody crowded

around him; florid congratulations were as thick as autumnal leaves "that strowed the banks of Vallambrosa:" enthusiastic hand-shaking was the normal state of man; and that "thrilling speech" was the burden of every man's theme, on that occasion. Lincoln got disengaged from the applauding crowd at length; and he and I started off in the direction of Judge Davis' house; but immediately diverged into a side street to shake off everybody; and as soon as we were out of every one's hearing Lincoln at once commenced a line of remark upon the extraordinary scene we had just witnessed, and whose prime mover he was, at the same time bending his head down to make our conversation more confidential. In a glow of enthusiasm I said in reply to a question by him: "You know that my statements about your speeches are not good authority, so I will tell you what Dubois, who is not so enthusiastic as I am, said to me as we came out of the hall. He said: 'Whitney, that is the greatest speech ever made in Illinois and it puts Lincoln on the track of the Presidency.'"

While I was making this reply, he walked along without straightening himself up for some thirty seconds, perhaps without saying a word; but with a thoughtful, abstracted look: -- then he

straightened up and immediately made a remark about some common-place subject, having no reference to the subject we had been considering.

Dubois' opinion was, when I told him of it, that Lincoln's first conception of the Presidency dated from this incident.
