

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Illustrations for Chapter XXIX

- 1) Copley print of an engraving made from the Cooper Union photograph published in the last number of this series, retouched and copy-righted in 1904 by Curtis and Cameron.
- 2) The first mention in any newspaper of the name of Abraham Lincoln for the presidency in 1860 is believed to be the above - a dispatch from Mansfield, Ohio to the Commercial Register of Sandusky, O., under date of November 6, 1858. Reproduced from Vol. III of the Illinois State Historical Library publications, Lincoln Series.
- 3) At the Illinois State Republican Convention, held in Decatur in May 1860, the gathering at which Lincoln was chosen as state candidate for the Presidency, the rails that he had cut were first brought in as proof of his worth. From that time they became a favorite political symbol. His rail was the Constitution. The above cartoon, taken from Harper's Weekly is one, if not the first of a great number in which the rail was used.
- 4) Republican Wigwag at Chicago, Ill.
Reproduced from Harper's Weekly of May 3, 1860.
- 5) Fac-simile of a letter written to Caleb B. Smith of Indiana, the week after Mr. Lincoln's nomination to the Presidency.

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CHAPTER XXIX

In the Hands of His Friends

V So far as I knew, the first mention of Abraham Lincoln as the Republican candidate for the presidency in 1860 was made in an Ohio paper on November 6, 1858, the week of his defeat by Douglas. The fac-simile of that notice is here published - a dispatch to the Commercial Register - Sandusky Herald from Mansfield, O., saying that an enthusiastic demonstration had just been made at a mass meeting there for Lincoln as president. Who engineered this demonstration I do not know though I have always supposed it to have been David R. Locke (Petroleum V. Nasby) who was the editor ^{or about} at that time of the Mansfield Herald. Locke had just returned from Illinois where he had heard at least one of the debates, that at Quincy. His impression of Mr. Lincoln I have already quoted. He had come away deeply impressed that here was a man of rare intellectual and moral vigor and integrity.

But it did not take an Ohian to recognize Lincoln's quality, as we know. One of the powerful and beautiful effects of the ^{honest} individual and self-directed course which we have been following was the impression ^{d.} that had been made on youth. Young men had been

caught by the elevation of his thought, the loftiness of his conception of our democratic scheme, and his faith in its ultimate realization. He awakened the high-minded youth of Illinois as no man in the State had ever done. The distinguished Horace White, then a boy of twenty, first heard Lincoln in 1854 when he made his great argument against the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, declared that the spell of that speech was upon him to the end of his life. White had heard Webster's reply to Hayne, but he thought Lincoln's greater in its English style and that it excelled in ^{these} ~~things which already marked Lincoln's style in 1854~~, contrary to the judgment of those who find nothing distinguished in his style before he was president - "simplicity, directness and lucidity which appeal both to the intellect and the heart." After that speech Horace White had no doubt about who his leader in Illinois was to be.

Young men who like Joseph Medill had been swept off their feet by the "Lost Speech" at Bloomington in May 1856 were from that hour wholly committed to Abraham Lincoln as a leader. Even more radical youth, men like Paul Shelby, who were engineering groups of protest before the Republican party had crystalized in the State, were so convinced of Lincoln's fundamental rightness that most of them were willing to merge their radical undertakings into any fusion of which he should be a leader. He had made the greatest of conquests, the conquest of high minded youth - made it by virtue of the soundness of his thinking, the sincerity of his spirit and by the conviction of superior wisdom that he made - made without any pretence, simply by

power of the quality itself. When it came to the debates of 1858 this pull on youth increased.

The judgment of Lincoln's friends, those who had known him for years in Illinois as a politician, a lawyer, a friend, became increasingly serious as they watched him. Here was a big man. And with the close of the debates, far from dropping out of sight, the fate that Lincoln had intimated might happen to him, his name kept coming up among the Republicans - first as Governor, which he would not think of, and repeatedly as a possible Illinois candidate for the presidency.

If the first mention of his name in the country was in Ohio, the first in Illinois was only a few days later in the Chicago Democrat where a column long editorial headed "Abraham Lincoln" appeared in which it was suggested that his name should be presented to the National Republican convention, first for president, next for vice-president. "We should then say to the United States at large that in our opinion the Great Man of Illinois is Abraham Lincoln and none other than Abraham Lincoln."

So far as I know, there was no other mention of Mr. Lincoln's name at home or abroad until in May of 1859 when William O. Stoddard, the editor of the Central Illinois Gazette of Champagne said in a discussion of "Who Shall Be the Next President?"

"As for Illinois, it is the firm and fixed belief of our citizens that for one or other of the offices in question (president or vice-president) no man will be so sure to consolidate the party vote of the State or will carry the great Mississippi valley with a more irresistible rush of popular

enthusiasm than our distinguished fellow citizen

"ABRAHAM LINCOLN

"We, in Illinois, know him well, in the best sense of the word, a true Democrat, a man of the people, whose strongest friends and supporters are the hard-handed and strong-limbed laboring men, who hail him as a brother and who look upon him as one of their real representative men. A true friend of freedom, having already done important service for the cause, and proved his abundant ability for still greater service; yet a staunch conservative, whose enlarged and liberal mind descends to no narrow view, but sees both sides of every great question, and of whom we need not fear that fanaticism on the one side, or servility on the other, will lead him to the betrayal of any trust. We appeal to our brethren of the ^Republican press for the correctness of our assertions."

I have before me a letter from Mr. Stoddard written in 1896 in which he says:

"The 'Coming Out' leader was my own without suggestion from anybody. I sent copies to nearly every paper in the State and to a large number of journals all over the country. Hundreds of these reprinted the 'editorial' in whole or in part and scores followed in the line of approval.

"The movement was not engineered in any way by anybody, it was altogether spontaneous."

It was not long, however, before what Mr. Stoddard had started became so impressive that a large group of Lincoln's friends in Illinois - chief among them being Jesse Fell, Judge David Davis and Leonard Swett - began seriously to discuss the possibility of nominating him. A strong leaning toward Lincoln began to appear in the Republic state committee as well as in the ^Republican press. One skillful manoeuvre was the going of

Joseph Medill, the editor of the Chicago Tribune to Washington to tell everybody that he could collar there what a great man they had in Illinois - a man that could carry doubtful states. Medill carried on his work of talking up his candidate with energy and finally in February of 1860 had it well enough in hand to bring out the Tribune for Lincoln.

By this time things had gone so far that Lincoln himself began to feel uncomfortable about what might happen to him in Illinois. He had, he knew, a solid and devoted following, but ever since the Republican party had been organized he and the majority of Republicans in the State had had in mind for the presidency one man above all others, and that was William H. Seward of New York. And after Seward there was Salmon P. Chase of Ohio. These were men who had been in the front of the battle against the extension of slavery before Lincoln ^{been convinced} had realized that there ^{must be} was a struggle. He had accepted them. They had been his leaders. Indeed, it was probably from Seward that he caught his first definite sense that a fight was on. All the Northern part of Illinois was committed to Seward, he knew. What chance had he in his own State? Before he went to New York for his Cooper Union speech in February he was writing to the Chairman of the Republican Committee that though he was not in a position where it would hurt much for him not to be named by the National Committee, it would hurt him not to get the Illinois delegates. That is, when Lincoln went East he was already a candidate for the presidency of the United States.

That trip gave his friends more good ammunition than they had dreamed. Indeed, there were not a few that had doubted the advisability of his speaking in the East, fearing that he might undo the impression that he had made in his contest with Douglas. It was still hard for many to see in this man whom they had known from Vandalia days on - this man so simple in his habits, so unworldly in character and practice - anything that would impress the dignified Eastern group at the head of Republicanism. Lincoln better stay at home - let well enough alone - was their feeling. But Lincoln had gone, and he had come back with added glories. His enthusiastic supporters at home could now show to doubters what the papers of New York and New England had said of him. He could have given no better campaign material to them than what he brought back. It was not only those who were familiar with him at home that realized that here were the points of a great man, it was those who heard him for the first time in the critical and cultivated East.

Lincoln's business took him at once to Chicago, for he was then engaged on the famous "sand-bar case" which meant so much to the city. And here he had plenty of evidence of the importance which was attached to his candidacy. They called for him right and left to talk, and he did yield far enough to go out to Evanston to spend a night, a trip every detail of which has been worked up by the Evanston Historical Society and preserved in a memorial pamphlet.

Here at Evanston, just as everywhere, he left behind a memory of his engaging personality. In an unpublished letter written many years ago by the great temperance advocate, Frances E. Willard, she says:

"When my brother was a theological student in the University at Evanston (1859-61) Abraham Lincoln prominently before the country came to Evanston as a guest of Gen. Julius White (the hero of Pea Ridge Battle). Gen White brought Lincoln to the theological department where he spoke briefly to the students, but what impressed them - and I heard my brother tell us of it in great glee when he came home at noon - Lincoln invited some of the students who were walking along with him in the campus to compete in jumping over a wall or fence I don't remember which it was. This they did to the best of their ability and at the close he vaulted over, as my brother said, 'profiting by his long legs' and set them all into laughter and applause by his performance."

Candidate as he was, Mr. Lincoln was not reduced to a state where he was incapable of a clear judgment on what the chances of other men beside himself were in the State. There is a valuable letter to R. M. Corwine of Ohio, written early in April, just after he came back from Chicago, which shows this. Corwine wanted to know what Lincoln really thought about Illinois, and

he answered: "Remembering that when not a very great man begins to be mentioned for a very great position, his head is very likely to be a little turned, I concluded I am not the fittest person to answer the questions you ask. Making due allowance for this, I think Mr. Seward is the very best candidate we could have for the North of Illinois, and the very worst for the South of it. The estimate of Gov. Chase here is neither better nor worse than of Seward, except that he is a newer man. They are regarded as being almost the same, seniority giving Seward the inside track. Mr. Bates, I think, would be the best man for the South of our State, and the worst for the North of it. If Judge McLean was fifteen, or even ten years younger, I think he would be stronger than either, in our State, taken as a whole; but his great age, and the recollection of the deaths of Harrison and Taylor have, so far, prevented his being much spoken of here."

"I really believe we can carry the State for either of them, or for any one who may be nominated; but doubtless it would be easier to do it with some than with others.

"I feel disqualified to speak of myself in this matter.

A little later he wrote to Senator Lyman Trumbull who asked him to be entirely frank:

"As you request, I will be entirely frank. The taste is in my mouth a little; and this, no doubt, disqualifies me, to some extent, to form correct opinions. You may confidently rely, however, that by no advice or consent of mine, shall my pretensions be pressed to the point of endangering our common cause.

"Now, as to my opinions about the chances of others in Illinois. I think neither Seward nor Bates can carry Illinois if Douglas shall be on the track; and that either of them can, if he shall not be. I rather think McLean could carry it with D. on or off; in other words, I think McLean is stronger in Illinois, taking all sections of it, than either S. or B.; and I think S. the weakest of the three. I hear no objection to Mr. McLean, except his age; but that objection seems to occur to every one; and it is possible it might leave him no stronger than the others."

These observations are entirely in line with our best opinion of Mr. Lincoln.

Unfortunately, there is a correspondence of this period that leaves a less pleasant feeling in the mind. It is with a Kansas politician, one Mark Delahay, who had written him saying, evidently that he would like to go to the Chicago convention as a delegate but that he did not have money enough and probably intimating that if he did go he would support Mr. Lincoln. Delahay

was not a stranger to Mr. Lincoln. He had known him when on the Circuit in Illinois in earlier years - known him as a rather sporty lawyer. Delahay later had settled in Kansas and had been active in the struggle against the introduction of slavery. He had urged Mr. Lincoln to come to Kansas to speak, and it was probably he that finally persuaded him to do so and arranged his itinerary. It is certain that he was Delahay's guest while there. Probably feeling that he was under obligations to the man, Lincoln wrote a letter in reply to his hint for money to go to the Chicago convention, which is the only one, I believe, of its kind in all his published correspondence. ^{In it} ~~It is one in which~~ he tells Delahay that he cannot enter the ring on the money basis, first, because in the main it is wrong, and secondly, because he has not and cannot get the money. He goes on to say, however, that there are certain objects in a political contest for which money is both right and indispensable. Evidently he thinks paying the expenses of a delegate to a national convention may be one of them, for he says that he will furnish Delahay \$100. to bear the expense of the trip.

In this same letter Delahay had asked his help in his ambition to be made one of the first senators from Kansas. Lincoln tells him there is nothing he can do for him as he is not personally acquainted with a single member of the legislature. As for his friendship for him, "that friendship" he says, "was abundantly manifested by me last December in Kansas." One of Lincoln's early appointments as president was Delahay as Surveyor General of

Kansas and Nebraska. Later he made him United States District Judge for Kansas, where he seems to have made a scandalous record. It is hard to believe that at the time Lincoln was showing so many favors to the man that he believed him to be a corrupt politician. He knew that he had been a staunch supporter of Lincoln ^{and slavery} doctrines in Kansas; if charges of corruption came to him he probably set them down as largely due to political hostility. It was doubtless a case where he was favoring a man that he did not thoroughly know. The idea that he was purchasing a vote at the Chicago convention is of course absurd. As a matter of fact, the Kansas delegates were appointed for Seward, and Lincoln advised Delahay when he knew this: "Don't stir them up to anger but come along to the convention and I will do as I said about expenses."

The Illinois Republicans did not get around to choose their candidate for president until the 10th of May, less than a fortnight before the national convention was held. Why Decatur was chosen for that convention I do not know, but there is a certain satisfaction in having it so. Decatur, as we know, was where Lincoln had first landed when he came into Illinois, and two or three times a year at least, after he was admitted to the bar, he had spent more or less time in the town. In scores of ways he was bound to its people so that when the convention ^{met} came in May 1860 he knew that he was going among friends in Decatur, but he knew well enough, too, that he was not going to a unanimous convention. There was a strong group of Seward men in the body, among them

friends of ^{his} Lincoln's. For instance, one of his oldest friends, O.H. Browning with whose family Lincoln had been intimate since the early days in Vandalia, was doubtful of the wisdom of nominating Lincoln and much preferred that Seward should be their candidate. It is interesting to recall that when the delegates to the Chicago convention were being named at Decatur and Browning's name was up, ~~that Lincoln's friends, like~~ Richard Oglesby, urged him to disapprove of it. He refused. He knew all about Browning, he said, and it would be a good deal safer for him to be in Chicago with the delegation where they could keep an eye on him than working on the outside.

There is no doubt that Lincoln was distressed at the convention as he had been ^{from the start} by the thought of what seemed to him his unfitness as compared with that of Gov. Seward. We have more than one proof of this feeling. It was in his mind as he watched the struggle between his own friends and those of Seward. At one point the debate grew hot to the point of an exchange of unpleasant epithets between the speakers. Lincoln sat crouching at one side, a picture of humiliation and despair.

There probably was no serious question in Lincoln's or his followers' minds but that the convention would select him, but no one could have foreseen the enthusiasm with which it was done. This was due to the vent that was given to pent-up emotions by the introduction of a banner mounted on two old fence rails, announcing Lincoln as

THE RAIL CANDIDATE
FOR PRESIDENT IN 1860

The rails, so the legend below the head lines ran, were from "a lot of 3000 split in 1830 by John Hanks" - He carried the banner - " and Abe Lincoln whose father was the first pioneer of Macon County." (The legend was wrong in this statement - there were ^{several} many settlers in Macon County ahead of Thomas Lincoln)

Probably never in the political history of this country has there been anything picked up more quickly as a fitting campaign cry than these rails, unless perhaps the log cabin in the days of Harrison. Here was something typifying a stage of the experience of the man, most precious to the great mass of self-made Americans. He knew what labor meant, ^{for} and they all knew that cutting rails was real labor. There began that day at Decatur when John Hanks marched into the hall with the rail that Abe made, an outburst of pioneer enthusiasm which has never been duplicated in the country. Slogans, campaign signs, cartoons from now on used the rail as a party symbol.

What had happened at Decatur no doubt encouraged Mr. Lincoln that he had a chance at Chicago. One of the young men who was in his office at that time says that he had begun to build White House castles for him after the Cooper Union speech, but he would only laugh indulgently when he talked to him and say, "John, I haven't a chance in a hundred." But things moved fast now. John did not give up the idea, even prepared a speech which he expected to have a chance to deliver in case Mr. Lincoln was nominated. He asked Mr. Lincoln to hear it, but for a long time he declined. Then one afternoon, coming into the office, he said, "Well, John, I think I feel strong

enough this afternoon to stand that speech."

One of the cleverest manoeuvres of Lincoln's supporters was securing the convention for Chicago. It gave outsiders a chance ~~that they could not get otherwise to have an opportunity~~ to see what Illinois thought of her candidate, how they were willing to work for him. Held anywhere else it would have been practically impossible to have had on the ground a large group of men pledged to Lincoln's support nor would it have been possible for them to have worked with the same self-assurance that they did in Chicago.

Simmered down, we can say that Lincoln's nomination for the presidency in Chicago on May 19, 1860, was due, first, to William H. Seward's enemies, and, second, to his own friends. The honor of engineering the extraordinary effort necessary to convince a majority of the delegates, first that Seward could not be elected in Pennsylvania, Indiana, Illinois and New Jersey, and secondly that Abraham Lincoln could, belongs to Judge David Davis, on whose circuit Lincoln had long traveled and whose personal devotion to the man exceeded even his political conviction that he was the best candidate. In a letter written me some years ago by Judge John M. Scott of Bloomington, I find this judgment on the Chicago work, and I think with those who have studied the operations of the convention closest, this remains a sound judgment:

"It is the belief of many that that which did more than any one thing else to force the nomination of Mr. Lincoln after the assembling of the convention was the personal power and influence of Judge David Davis and without which

it is not thought, he would have received the nomination. Judge Davis possessed unusual power and ability to control a body of men by forming combinations and otherwise, but most of all by the force of his personal character. He was present with the coming of the first members of the convention and from that time on he was among them - in the day and in the night - entreating and persuading delegates as few men had the ability to do. The cause of his friend was more to him than it would have been had it been personal to himself. He rested not in the great work from the time it commenced until the hour of triumph came. By nature he was vehement and forceful but when aroused by an intense purpose he wielded an influence few men could withstand. This overcome when entreaty and persuasion failed."

To scores of the ablest men in the country, Illinois' victory was a tragedy - a tragedy because it was Seward's defeat. In their judgment the nomination was due him not only because he had been so long the leader of the cause but because of his experience, his training, his proved ability in public affairs. His rejection seemed a calamity to them. In the tremendous demonstration that followed Lincoln's selection the distress of Seward's supporters impressed even the boys in the crowd as is told in the following story of the convention by W. T. Norton of Alton, Ill. Mr. Norton had wormed his way to the boy's favorite place in great assemblies - the edge of the platform, and years later wrote his recollections of the scene.

"I was then in school at Lake Forest. In company with my roommate, I came down to witness the great convention on the last day of its session. We got up at 5:00 o'clock in the morning, went down to the wigwam and planted ourselves against the main doorway. There we waited until the doors were opened at 9:00 o'clock. The rush of the crowd carried us down into the pit, clear to the delegates' platform. Boy-like, we climbed upon the edge of the platform, and no one had

a better view of the proceedings than ourselves. I remember the roll call of states for the presidential nomination and the responses of the partisans of Lincoln, Seward, Chase, Cameron, Bates, as they were successively placed in nomination. It was at once noticeable, judging from the volume of the applause each candidate's name evoked, that, whatever the preference of the delegates, the spectators were overwhelmingly with Lincoln, with Seward's followers next in strength. Not only was the vast crowd inside the building for Lincoln, but the masses swarming outside were likewise cheering wildly for the man from Illinois. The clamor for Lincoln was not only enthusiastic, but insistent. Doubtless it had its effect on the delegates.

"Had the convention been held elsewhere than in Chicago, Seward, then the national leader of the new party, would doubtless have been nominated, but the crowd in the convention hall, and the supporters outside who echoed their shouts, were for Lincoln and would not be denied. Was this the prophetic instinct of 'coming events casting their shadows before?' The enthusiasm in the wigwag as the balloting progressed and the successive results were announced is indescribable, but the scene itself is indelibly inscribed on my memory. I have seen many great assemblies since, and varied national conventions, but never one like this, when the new party of freedom, in its stalwart youth was choosing its leader with the foresight of those guided by inspiration. Of the speeches I recall but two which impressed me especially. One was that of Norman B. Judd, chairman of the Illinois delegation, in placing Lincoln in nomination. The other was that of William F. Evarts of the New York delegation who, after what seemed long delay, and in response to persistent calls of 'New York! New York!' rose to accede to the will of the majority as expressed on the third ballot. It was a bitter pill for Evarts and the entire New York delegation, whose idol had fallen. They were blindly devoted to Seward, and had moved their hosts to Chicago in full confidence of victory.

"I recall Evarts as he rose to speak - tall, straight, and spare of figure, with tears of disappointment coursing down his high bred face. But he was a patriot and a statesman as well as a partisan, and made a wonderful speech in giving in the adhesion of the Empire State to the new leader, who had come out of the West. I do not remember what he said, only the effect and the impression, and that he captured the crowd and the convention.

the Judge's appearance before and after the convention.

"He had gone there," says Mr. Rankin, "to head the Illinois delegation. clad in the finest new suit he had ever worn, and his head crowned with a tall new shining silk hat, the best that our Springfield 'Adams, Matter' had ever made. He came back with his suit a sight to behold, dusty, and wrinkled beyond all recognition, for he had not been out of it since he had left Springfield. He came back wearing a little Scotch cap, the glossy tall silk hat having been left somewhere in the débris of the Wigwam, near Lake Michigan, after Logan had beaten it into shapeless ruin over the heads and shoulders of his fellow-delegates upon announcement of the third ballot. No one would credit this report at first, but everybody who had been there said it was true - except the Judge. And he was silent."

Mr. Rankin further tells of the meeting between his own father and Judge Logan. "Rankin" - he said it in a whisper for he had shouted away all the voice he had in Chicago - "I am even with Lincoln now. He made me drop him and vote for Trumbull for United Senator in 1856, to keep Matteson out. I cried then like a baby with vexation and wrath. Now I've had my revenge. He will be President;" and the two grey Kentuckians, - old Whig veterans of the Henry Clay campaigns, - clasped each other, crying for joy like children."

In that picture we have the second biggest factor in the first nomination of Abraham Lincoln to the presidency - the first being the opposition to Seward.

Lincoln took it calmly. He was not elected yet. He admitted things began well - too well, perhaps. What was to happen in the next six months is the story of our next chapter.