

A New Story of Lincoln's Gentleness

An incident occurred during one of the sessions of the Menard County Circuit Court at the period mentioned, that furnished an illustration of Mr. Lincoln's easy manner with his former country-folk friends around Salem, even under trying circumstances.

Political "stump speaking" was not then put aside during court terms, but, on the contrary, promoted by them. A platform had been erected in one corner of the court house yard, for use during an autumn's session of the Circuit Court, and was being used alternately by Whig and Democratic speakers at noon-day, or in the afternoons and evenings after adjournment of court.

On the day referred to the judge announced, at the close of the morning session, that court would not convene again until "about three o'clock." It was understood, without the saying, that public speaking caused this concession. After dinner the people from all directions began assembling in the court house yard near the platform. The latter was a crude affair, yet of generous size. Two rude bench seats, made from slabs, extended its full length at the back side. No table or board stood on the front of the platform to hold the paper-canned thoughts in manuscript that some present day speakers require. Rude board steps at each end led up and down the several feet in height of the platform.

After dinner, on the day referred to, the judge, lawyers and neighboring "Squires," and "principal citizens" began filling these seats ready for a speech to begin. Presently, from all sides arose the cry of "Lincoln!" "Lincoln!" -- "Abe Lincoln!"

Mr. Lincoln, who was never in any degree of haste to begin a speech, arose leisurely from his seat on the platform, took off his tall hat, shook down its contents of letters, papers and clippings from newspapers, with which it was partly filled, and stooping down, placed it carefully under the bench on the platform where he had been sitting, and then turning, faced the

crowd around the platform and began his speech.

A few minutes after there appeared in front of the platform, just beneath where Mr. Lincoln was standing, James Pantier, resting his folded arms on the outer edge of the platform. There he stood with face upturned at an angle, so that he could look up the nearly seven feet into the speaker's face. His hat was pushed back to the greatest angle possible, on the back of his head and shoulders; and, such a hat! All semblance of rim or crown had been soaked and pressed out of it by rains and snow from without, and by the heat and moisture from toil, of the head on which it now rested, like a huge funnel-shaped hopper.

His clothing would have been the despair of a modern society editor to describe. I will mention the hunting-shirt made of home woven blue jeans, trimmed across the shoulders with buckskin fringes; the sailor collar, wide and overlapping in front, fringed also with long buckskin lacings, most practically designed to fold over the head in storms of wind, rain and snow; trousers of home woven, bark colored jeans, faced above and below the knee with buckskin -- too short at the ankles by many inches and showing feet shod with heavy boots, foxy-red by long tramps on hunting trips through the wild prairies of blue stem grasses and timber undergrowths.

Thus clad and poised, for several minutes stood Jimmie Pantier -- hunter, trapper, faith-doctor, saw-mill owner and farmer of Sandridge; one of the oldest settlers there, and among the first of Lincoln's friends to assist him financially when sorely pressed by debts at Salem, and at whose home of plenty Lincoln had been often entertained on his surveying tramps, or hunting through Sandridge and Salt Creek bottoms.

At length, failing to attract Mr. Lincoln's notice, his clear treble voice piped out -- "Howdy Abe!" -- and yet even the third time -- "Howdy dy Abe!" before Mr. Lincoln, who had ceased speaking, perceived where the call came from. Then, looking down, he cordially exclaimed; "Why, how are you, Uncle Jammie!" and, stooping, clasped Pantier's hand,

shaking it heartily, and meantime, half bent, still holding Pantier by the hand, led him slowly along the front edge of the platform to the steps at the end, then up these and across to the seat he had vacated himself a few minutes before, where he seated the old pioneer, and returning to his former position on the platform, took up the line of his argument where it had been interrupted, and proceeded as if no pause had been made.

Pantier meanwhile, after being seated, removed the remarkable hat, twisting it about as if uncertain what to do with it, until noticing Mr. Lincoln's hat under the seat, he rolled his up and thrust the crude bunch into that, and then settling himself comfortably back in the seat with Judge Treat on one side and the Hon. B. S. Edwards on the other, fixed his eyes and attention on the something less than seven feet of Mr. Lincoln as he stood speaking in front of him.

But he acted ill at ease. There was something irrespressible in his manner, something that must come out. He had come to town that day to see Mr. Lincoln and hear him speak, and he wished to treat him with all possible courtesy at his former home. He had once before this visited Springfield to see Mr. Lincoln and his family in their home, where Mrs. Mary Lincoln had royally entertained and enjoyed the quaint old character, thus winning this simple hearted man's interest and love forever. He now showed by nervous squirmings about on his seat that something was unfinished. At length the treble voice piped out -- "Abe! Abe! -- I forgot to ax you about how Mary and the babies were!"

Mr. Lincoln again stopped, turned half way around towards Pantier, and in a low gentle voice replied: "all well, when I left them at Springfield yesterday morning, Uncle Jimmie; all very well, thank you!" -- and resumed his speech as if nothing unusual or private had again interrupted him.
