

J. M. Ruggles

Pekin

Reminiscences of the Pekin Convention,
and of Abraham Lincoln. — prepared by J. M. Ruggles

Previous to the year 1843 Illinois had but three Congressional districts. The northern district embraced about two thirds of the territory and probably four fifths of the present population of the State. It had been represented by Gov. Joseph Duncan, of Jacksonville, previous to his election as Governor in 1834, and by Wm. L. May, of Springfield, as his successor both Democrats. In 1838 Stephen A. Douglass, of Jacksonville, was the Democratic candidate and John J. Stuart, of Springfield, his Whig opponent. A thorough canvass — both in one private carriage was made all over this vast Territory, resulting in Stuart's election by seven majority the first Whig triumph in Illinois. Stuart was again elected in 1840.

The apportionment under the Census of 1840 giving the State seven Congressmen in place of three — was not made in time for the election in 1842, and was postponed for a year. Meanwhile the leading politicians of the State were very active in getting ready to go to Congress. In the Capital district Col. E. D. Baker of Springfield, afterwards U. S. Senator from Oregon, and Gen. John J. Hardin, of Jacksonville — one of the famous Kentucky family of Hardins — killed in the battle of Buena Vista — were the leading Whig champions. A very spirited campaign was carried on until the meeting of the Pekin Convention, in May, 1843.

When ^{the Convention} assembled Baker was there with his friend and champion delegate

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Abraham Lincoln. The ages and uses had been taken and there were
15 votes apiece, and one in doubt that had not arrived. ^{that - was myself} ~~The one in~~
~~doubt~~ was James M. Buggles, of Scott County, ^{I was} known to be a warm friend
of Baker, representing people who were partial to Hardin. ^{as soon as I} ~~at the arrival~~
^{Baker hurried to me} ~~of Mr. Buggles he was immediately interviewed by Baker - saying "how is~~
~~it? - it all depends on you."~~ On being told that notwithstanding ^{my} ~~his~~ partiality
for Baker, the people ~~he~~ represented expected ^{me} ~~him~~ to vote for Hardin
and ^{truly - I} ~~he~~ would have to do so. Baker at once replied "you are right -
there is no other way." The convention was organized, ^{and I was elected} ~~with Buggles as~~
~~secretary.~~ Baker immediately arose and made a most thrilling address -
thoroughly arousing the sympathies of the convention - and ended by de-
clining his candidacy. Hardin was nominated by acclamation -
and then came the episode.

Immediately after the nomination Mr. Lincoln walked across
the room to the ^{my} ~~secretary's~~ table and asked Mr. ^{me} ~~Buggles~~ if ^I ~~he~~ would
favor a resolution recommending Baker for the next term? On
being answered in the affirmative he said - "you prepare the resolution -
I will support it - and I think we can pass it." The resolution
created a profound sensation, especially with the friends of Hardin. After
an excited and angry discussion the resolution passed by a majority of one.
Hardin was elected over his opponent, James A. McDougal, who was
after that a U. S. Senator from the state of California.

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A year later the Convention met at Tremont. Again Mr. Lincoln was a delegate and ~~also Mr. Briggs~~² who was again made secretary. Col. Baker, being the only candidate, was soon nominated, and in due time elected over his Democratic opponent, John Calhoun of Kansas notoriety.

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Peterburg - see H. R. 272, V. 2, 1

In 1846 the Convention met at Mt. Pleasant. This time Mr. Lincoln was the only candidate, and Briggs again a delegate. Mr. Lincoln was nominated and elected over his Democratic opponent Peter Cartwright, the famous Methodist preacher, and served his first and only term in Congress.

In 1848 Stephen J. Logan, of Springfield, was the Whig candidate, beaten Major Thomas L. Harris of Petersburg. In 1850 Richard Yates, the great war governor, was the Whig candidate who defeated Maj. Harris.

The unsolved political problem is whether or not Mr. Lincoln foresaw in the Peikin resolution that rotation as to Baker would in due time land himself in Congress? At that time both Hardin and Baker ranked higher in political circles than Lincoln, and a little strategy that might serve his own ambition was entirely pardonable. Be that as it may, the rotation established in that Convention continued as long as the district remained and the political honors were divided among the most deserving men in the district.

The Peikin Convention was an opening field of fateful

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political ambition for a trio of great men whose mortal lives were destroyed by the deadly bullet—Hardin on the battle field of Buena Vista—Baker at Ball's Bluffs—and Lincoln at the hands of the assassin.

Of the delegates in that Convention, held over half a century ago—two are known to survive—Francis Low, a banker, and James M. Ruggles, an agriculturist—living as neighbors and friends in Havana, Ills. They were both—17 years later—delegates to the Decatur state convention—on the 9th and 10th of May, 1860, where Mr. Lincoln was formally brought forward a candidate for President—and both went from there to the Chicago Convention that nominated him—Mr. Ruggles serving as a delegate.

At Decatur both were at the same hotel with Mr. Lincoln and urged him to go with them to Chicago. He walked with them to the depot and on the way said, among other things, "I should like to go—but possibly I am too much of a candidate to be there—and probably not enough to keep me away—on the whole I think I had best not go." With a little enthusiasm the reply was—"as to that, Mr. Lincoln, we are going to nominate you!"—and they went on their way to Chicago.

Messrs Low and Ruggles were also present and near by Mr. Lincoln ^{when} he and family were on the car about to leave for Washington.

on the 11th of February, 1861—at the time he made his parting and wonderfully pathetic speech to his friends and neighbors—on which much church people rely as evidence of his being ⁱⁿ accord with them.

Note. For an exhaustive and critical review of Mr. Lincoln's moral and religious qualities see the Chicago Tribune editorial of September 2, 1891.

And for a most thorough and truthful analysis of his entire character—see the letter of Hon. Leonard Smith—page 523, vol. 3, of Herndon's life of Lincoln.

These two articles tell the whole story of this most wonderful life and character.