

Lincoln Lore

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FOUNDATION

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LINCOLN'S FIRST CAMPAIGN

There are several versions of the story about defeated candidates "Going up Salt River," most of the traditions being associated with Henry Clay. Abraham Lincoln, staunch follower of Clay, also had a Salt River experience, which may have been the cause of his losing his first political race. On July 16, 1832, he was mustered out of service in the Black Hawk War, at Whitewater, Michigan Territory (now Wisconsin). The election, in which Lincoln was a candidate for the General Assembly, was announced for August sixth. But twenty days intervened between his discharge and the date of the election at New Salem, Illinois. Three hundred miles separated him from the place where he should, at that very moment, be campaigning.

When he arose the morning following his discharge, to make a hurried trip to the scene of the political battle, he found that his horse had been stolen. Except for a very short distance which he covered in a canoe he was obliged to walk. I have often thought that Lincoln's first and only defeat, at the hands of the people, was due to the stolen horse. If Henry Clay had not gone up Salt River instead of the Ohio, he would have been president, so tradition says. If Abraham Lincoln had not had his horse stolen, it is very likely that he would never have suffered defeat.

It is very doubtful whether Lincoln could have arrived in New Salem before August first, giving him but five days to campaign before the election. He had announced for the legislature on March 9, 1832, and enrolled in the militia on April nineteenth. During the interval between April 19 and August 1, he had had no personal contact with the voters in the county. His anxiety to get back to New Salem as early as possible was evidenced by his purchasing a canoe towards the last of the journey to hasten his arrival.

When the votes were counted, it was discovered that Lincoln had received 277 votes in his own precinct, all but three who voted casting their votes for him. In the entire County of San-

gamon he had received 657 votes, not enough to elect him, although his total was greater than five of the other thirteen candidates. He would have needed 159 more votes to have overtaken Peter Cartwright, who had the fewest votes of the four victorious candidates. If it had not been for the stolen horse, Lincoln's extra days of campaigning would have allowed him to gather enough votes to pass the candidate he was to defeat in later years, and thereby win for himself his first political campaign.

DECISION

The influence which brought about the decision of Abraham Lincoln to enter the field of politics has been, and still is, open to much speculation. There is no question but what John T. Stuart had much to do with some of his early political efforts. Long before he came to know Stuart his interest in public speaking was recognized by his associates. There are many traditions which point to his stump speeches during the Indiana residence indicating the interest he manifested in public questions even before he became of age. John Hanks, upon hearing one of the early Illinois politicians, boasted that Lincoln could beat him "all holler" although he had barely reached the age of twenty-one. Possibly the source of his early interest in politics might be more truly stated by saying he was a "born politician."

THE ANNOUNCEMENT

Lincoln is said to have first announced his candidacy for the legislature on the occasion of a public sale, where he mounted a stump and addressed the people as follows:

"Fellow Citizens: I presume you all know who I am. I am humble Abraham Lincoln. I have been solicited by many friends to become a candidate for the Legislature. My politics are short and sweet, like the old woman's dance. I am in favor of a national bank. I am in favor of the internal improvement system, and a high protective tariff. These are my sentiments and political principles. If elected, I shall be thankful; if not it will be all the same."

THE FIRST ADDRESS

The first address of Abraham Lincoln was printed and distributed as a handbill. I shall attempt to outline this speech including the introduction and part of the concluding words.

INTRODUCTION—"Having become a candidate for the honorable office of one of your representatives in the next General Assembly of this state, in accordance with an established custom and the principles of true Republicanism, it becomes my duty to make known to you, the people whom I propose to represent, my

sentiments with regard to local affairs."

ARGUMENT—The Improvement of the Sangamon River.

1. Internal improvements:
 - a. Opening of good roads.
 - b. Clearing of navigable streams.
 - c. Unequaled utility of railroads.
 - d. Prohibitive cost of railroads.
 - g. Improvement of Sangamon River.
 - Best suited to infant resources.
 - Has observed stages of river.
 - Drifted timber greatest barrier.
 - Dam to change river course.
 - Channels to straighten course.
 - Vastly important to the people.
2. A National Bank:
 - a. Loaning money at exorbitant rates.
 - b. Law fixing limits of usury.
 - c. Favors law which cannot be evaded.
3. Education:
 - a. Most important subject before us.
 - b. A moderate education for all.
 - c. Morality, sobriety, enterprise and industry hastened by it.
4. Existing Laws:
 - a. Alterations may be necessary.
 - b. Estray laws, road laws, etc.
 - c. Framers wiser than myself I should prefer not meddling with these laws.

CONCLUSION—"I am young and unknown to many of you. I was born and have ever remained in the most humble walks of life. I have no wealthy or popular relatives or friends to recommend me. My case is thrown exclusively upon the independent voters of the county; and, if elected, they will have conferred a favor upon me which I shall be unremitting in my labors to compensate. But, if the good people in their wisdom shall see fit to keep me in the background, I have been too familiar with disappointments to be very much chagrined."

ELECTION RESULTS

The election of representatives for the Eighth General Assembly of Illinois was held on August 6, 1832. The results of this election, as compiled below, are to be found in *The Early Life of Abraham Lincoln* by Tarbell, and *Illinois Election Returns 1818-1848* by Pease.

Candidates	New Salem Sangamon	
	Precinct	County
Edmund D. Taylor*	88	1127
John T. Stuart*	182	991
Achilles Morris*	27	945
Peter Cartwright*	62	815
Archer G. Herndon	84	806
William Carpenter	136	774
John Dawson	105	717
Abraham Lincoln	277	657
Thomas M. Neal	21	571
Richard Quinton	4	485
Zachariah Peters	4	214
Edward Robinson	15	169
William Kirkpatrick	0	44

*Elected.