

Lincoln Lore

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LINCOLN HISTORICAL RESEARCH
FOUNDATION

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THE FREEPORT DEBATE

This number of Lincoln Lore is published in honor of the Lincoln-Douglas debate anniversary which will be celebrated at Freeport, Illinois, August twenty-seventh. On this occasion an heroic bronze statue of Abraham Lincoln will be presented to the city of Freeport by one of its leading citizens, W. T. Rawleigh.

One of the objectives of the group sponsoring the dedicatory program, as announced in a bulletin is "to recapture the atmosphere of 1858." The subject matter of this broadside is compiled with this idea in view. As many readers of Lincoln Lore will be in attendance at the exercises, it is hoped that the incidents recalled by these columns will assist them in carrying with them to Freeport the atmosphere of this epochal debate.

WEATHER

During the early morning it was chilly, cloudy, and lowering. Changeable winds and occasional sunshine continued throughout the forenoon. At noon the weather settled dismally cold and damp and so continued throughout the day. It did not rain, however.

ARRIVALS

Douglas arrived in Freeport Thursday evening and, according to one press report, "was met by a vast multitude of persons . . . a grand salute was fired . . . thousands of persons flocked from the hotels and all parts of the city . . . a procession was formed and with not less than one thousand torches, music, the cheers of the people, and the thunders of the cannon, Judge Douglas was escorted to the Brewster House." Commenting on this report, another correspondent said, "A gun squad fired off their piece some half a dozen times, because they were paid for so doing. . . . The greatest number of persons did not exceed eight hundred to one thousand at any time that night. . . . The 'procession,' counting loafers and boys, did not number two hundred and fifty persons, and of that number by actual count, only seventy-four carried torches."

"Lincoln arrived on an extra train from the south and was welcomed at the depot by an immense assemblage of Republicans. He was saluted by the firing of cannons and escorted by a large procession headed by a band of music, with banners, to the Brew-

ster House. All the way along the route of procession he was received with unbounded enthusiasm." The foregoing is the reaction of one reporter whose observations differed somewhat from this correspondent's account of Lincoln's reception: "Lincoln arrived in town this morning and his political friends all around have paraded their strength, having at that the benefit of all the delegations, Democrat and Abolition, that came in. Their cannon did as good service as did that for Douglas, it was likely the same piece, but they could not come the torches, nor could they make the cheers which the Black Republicans so much covet, rise above the yell of a defeated pack of 'living dogs.' The only flag they had among them had lost its color—it looked as though it had been of a variety trailed in the dust."

RECEPTION

The Brewster House, at the time of the debate, had been completed just recently, and both candidates were taken to this hostelry upon their arrival. The fact that it still stands in Freeport will contribute, more than any other one thing, to the atmosphere of 1858. Here both Lincoln and Douglas were received by the reception committees of the two parties. Lincoln was formally received into Freeport by Hon. Thomas J. Turner, who delivered an address of welcome. Mr. Lincoln made a brief response. Here also Lincoln and Douglas were called upon to greet the arriving delegations, who demanded their appearance.

DELEGATIONS

Of the many groups which came to Freeport in a body, four deserve special mention. The Carroll County delegation brought a band with them and their banner announced "Carroll County for Abraham Lincoln." They arrived as early as nine o'clock. By ten o'clock the special trains began to come in. The one on which Mr. Lincoln traveled, including the delegates from Amboy, Dixon, and Polo, consisted of twelve crowded cars. The Galena special contained eight cars, but the train of sixteen cars transporting over a thousand persons eclipsed them all. It contained the delegation from Rockford, Marengo, and Belvidere.

ATTENDANCE

The local population attending the debate, which was approximately the total population of the town, has been set at 7,000. The number of visitors has been placed at 8,000, which would give a conservative estimate of the total attendance of 15,000. This is said to have been a third larger than the number attending the Ottawa debate. In the morning "the masses blocked up every avenue of approach to anywhere."

PRELIMINARIES

Some of Lincoln's followers learned that Douglas was to be escorted to the place of speaking in a splendid carriage, whereupon they secured an old fashioned conestoga wagon drawn by a team of six horses, the driver riding on one of the wheel horses. Lincoln and some of the substantial farmers occupied this wagon, which met with the approval of the masses. Douglas decided to walk to the appointed place rather than ride in the aristocratic vehicle which had been provided.

PROGRAM

The debate at Freeport, held in Goddard's grove, was the second of the seven scheduled debates. The Hon. Thomas J. Turner introduced Lincoln and Col. James Mitchell presented Douglas to the audience. The debate began at two o'clock. Lincoln spoke first for one hour; Douglas replied to him for one hour and a half, and Lincoln concluded with a rejoinder of half an hour's duration.

DEPARTMENT

The representatives of the press made much over the alleged platform department of each of the two candidates while the other was speaking. Lincoln is represented as being very uneasy; "He could not sit still, nor would his limbs sustain him while standing. He was shivering, quaking, trembling and his agony during the last fifteen minutes of Judge Douglas' speech was positively painful to the crowd who witnessed his behavior." On the other hand, according to one press dispatch, "During the whole of Mr. Lincoln's opening speech at the discussion on Friday last, Mr. Douglas sat near him smoking a cigar and puffing out its fumes for the benefit of the speaker and the ladies who were so unfortunate as to be in the immediate vicinity of this 'Shortboy Senator'."

MEMORIALS

At the corner of North State Avenue and East Douglas Street is a bronze tablet on a slab of stone bearing the following inscriptions: "Within this block was held the second joint debate in the senatorial contest between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas August 27, 1858—'I am not for the dissolution of the Union under any circumstances.' Douglas—'This government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free.' Lincoln—Erected by the Freeport Woman's Club 1902—Dedicated by President Roosevelt June 3, 1903."

At the entrance of Taylor Park, not far from where the memorable debate occurred, there will be unveiled at the forthcoming celebration the heroic bronze Lincoln by Leonard Crunelle. It is the first statue of Lincoln to be erected in any of the seven cities where his debates with Douglas were held.