

LINCOLN LORE

No. 152

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

March 7, 1932

LINCOLN LORE

BULLETIN OF
THE LINCOLN
HISTORICAL
RESEARCH
FOUNDATION



ENDOWED BY
THE LINCOLN
NATIONAL LIFE
INSURANCE
COMPANY

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CENTENNIAL OF LINCOLN'S FIRST POLITICAL EFFORT

Abraham Lincoln made his first political announcement just one hundred years ago. On March 9, 1832, he signed a written statement setting forth his political views, which were published in the Sangamon Journal for March 15, 1832. This issue of the paper also listed his name among the candidates for representative in the state legislature.

The editor of Lincoln Lore has recently made a careful survey of the Sangamon Journal for the entire year of 1832 and finds that it offers just the atmosphere needful to arouse Lincoln to the possibility of a political career.

In the issue of the paper for March 1, a correspondent signing his contribution "a voter" makes an appeal to the citizens which may have been directly responsible for Abraham Lincoln's entrance into the political arena. The contributed article follows:

"Since the various candidates for the Legislature have taken the field, I have frequently heard remarked that there would be no business of importance transacted by that party at their next session; consequently men holding those positions do not feel the interest they should in selecting men fitted for that honorable station—or rather would be honorable if preferment was a mark of honesty or talent—to be brief, however, it is my opinion that the legislature at their next session will have it in their power to do more to advance the interest of their constituents than has ever been done at any one session since the organization of the state. I will not undertake to enumerate the many subjects that may claim the attention of our representatives. One, however, which I consider of vital importance to the people of Illinois is the enormous per cent at which money is loaned.

"I would ask why it is worth in Sangamon County 50% when it is worth but 6% in other places. The borrower in New York for the use of \$1,000 in one year pays \$70 interest. The borrower in Illinois pays for the same amount the same length of time the sum of \$600, only \$530 more than he should be compelled to pay. I speak without fear of contradiction when I say that no cause has gone farther to retard the improvement and prosperity of our country than the present high rate of interest. Persons emigrating

to our country who cannot demand a few hundred dollars intended originally for the purchase of improvements or land are diverted from these laudable options by the prospect of a greater and immediate profit arising from the interest on their money, is ruin. Perhaps the unfortunate man who takes the loan after all losses by the transaction. . . . This is a legitimate subject of legislature and one of sufficient importance to call for the attention of the people. Let us then require of candidates an expression of their sentiments on the subject and say that we will support no men who will not pledge himself to agitate a law to effect this object."

Two weeks after the above appeal was printed the paper carried Lincoln's announcement in which he attempts to weave into his platform the suggestion about usury. His attitude toward the excessive rates of interest is found in the following words:

"It appears that the practice of loaning money at exorbitant rates of interest has already been opened as a field for discussion; so I suppose I may enter upon it without claiming the honor, or risking the danger which may await its first explorer. It seems as though we are never to have an end to this baneful and corroding system, acting almost as prejudicially to the general interests of the community as a direct tax of several thousand dollars annually laid on each county for the benefit of a few individuals only, unless there be a law made fixing the limits of usury. A law for this purpose, I am of the opinion, may be made without materially injuring any class of people."

The subject that occupied most of his attention, however, in this paper was the navigation of the Sangamon River. His interest here had also been built up by several announcements which appeared in the Journal that there was already under way a movement to bring a steam boat from Cincinnati to Springfield. A long editorial in the Journal for January 19, 1832, presented the possibility of the navigation of the Sangamon River and concluded by saying that "it would be worth more than a dozen of railroads in the newspapers." This editorial was prompted by a meeting of the citizens of Jacksonville reported in the Journal for January 2.

The report of this meeting is mentioned by Lincoln in his discussion. His conclusions about the comparative value of the river and railroad projects are set forth in the following paragraph:

"A meeting has been held by the citizens of Jacksonville and the adjacent country, for the purpose of deliberating and inquiring into the expediency of constructing a railroad from some eligible point on the Illinois River, through the town of Jacksonville, in Morgan County, to the town

of Springfield, in Sangamon County. This is, indeed, a very desirable object. No other improvement that reason will justify us in hoping for can equal in utility the railroad. It is a never-failing source of communication between places of business remotely situated from each other. Upon the railroad the regular progress of commercial intercourse is not interrupted by either high or low water, or freezing weather, which are the principal difficulties that render our future hopes of water communication precarious and uncertain.

"Yet, however desirable an object the construction of a railroad through our country may be; however high our imaginations may be heated at thoughts of it,—there is always a heart-appalling shock accompanying the amount of its cost, which forces us to shrink from our pleasing anticipations. The probable cost of this contemplated railroad is estimated at \$290,000; the bare statement of which, in my opinion, is sufficient to justify the belief that the improvement of the Sangamon River is an object much better suited to our infant resources."

One of the most significant facts observed by the reading of the Sangamon Journal is that Lincoln was in complete harmony in his political thinking with the editor of the Journal, who set forth in a prospectus in the issue of the paper for January 5 the following political platform of the paper.

"The proprietors believe that the General Government is authorized by the Constitution and required by its National Policy to employ a portion of the means of the Union in promoting a general system of internal improvements and they will not fail to point out the advantages which this state would derive from an energetic prosecution of this system. They also believe it to be the duty of the Government to protect by a sufficient tariff the industry of the country against the competition of foreigners and on the success of these principles they believe depends the prosperity of this state and the real success of our common county. With regard to party politics the proprietors say they will not be under any particular name. They will sustain the principles above without reference to the views of political aspirants. Talents, integrity, fitness for public life and an honest devotion to these principles to which the proprietors pledge themselves shall receive at their hands a liberal support. F. J. Francis."

Lincoln's political progress can in a large measure be traced to the support given to him by the Sangamon Journal and he soon became one of the political voices of this paper. Possibly the century celebration of this paper so recently observed should be more closely associated with the centennial of Abraham Lincoln's own introduction into politics.