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Dr. Louis A. Warren - - - Editor

LINCOLN'S INTRODUCTION TO SPRINGFIELD

On the twenty-fourth day of March, 1832, just one hundred years ago, Abraham Lincoln received a dramatic introduction to the people of Springfield, Illinois, the city where later he was to make his home.

Having recently announced through the columns of the Sangamon Journal his candidacy for the legislature, there was evidently some interest on the part of the citizens of the largest town within the county to see this young aspiring politician.

The occasion of this introduction to the people of Springfield, however, was not as a speaker in a political meeting but as the pilot of a steamboat.

It is evident from the news accounts that no event in the history of Springfield, up to that time, had caused more interest or brought together a larger number of people than did the arrival of the *Talisman*, the first steamer to ascend the Sangamon River.

As early as January 19 the Sangamon Journal announced that Mr. V. A. Bogue would attempt to bring a steamboat up the river loaded with goods for the merchants.

This announcement in the Cincinnati Daily Gazette for January 19, 1832, and reprinted in the Sangamon Journal must have stirred the people of Springfield:

"The splendid upper cabin steamer, *Talisman*, J. M. Pollock, master, will leave for Portland and Springfield on the Sangamon River and all intermediate ports and landing at Beardstown, Maples, St. Louis, Louisville, on Thursday, February 2, for freight or passengers, having superior accommodations. Apply to Captain Vincent A. Bogue at the Brdaoway Hotel or to Allison Owen."

In the meantime Captain Bogue had written the following communication which was published in the Journal of January 26:

"I should be met at the mouth of the river by ten or twelve men having axes with long handles under the direction of some experienced man, and one of the men should be one of those who have most often ascended the river in flatboats to show the course of the stream."

On Washington's Birthday the steamer reached St. Louis and Mr. Bogue wrote another letter to the editors of the Journal advising them of his safe arrival at that point.

When the boat reached Beardstown it was greeted by a great crowd, among them the men who had come prepared to assist in clearing the way for the steamer. The man selected to pilot the steamer from Beardstown to Springfield was none other than Abraham Lincoln.

He seems to have complied with the demands of Bogue that one of the men should be familiar with the course of the river. Lincoln once had built and operated a flatboat on this stream and seemed to be qualified for the task assigned him. He was at this time engaged as a clerk in a store for the man whom he had served as flatboatman.

Another consideration seems to have suggested Lincoln as the proper pilot of the *Talisman*. But two weeks had passed since there appeared in the Journal a lengthy discussion about the navigation of the Sangamon which he had incorporated in his announcement as a candidate for the Legislature. Here was a chance for him to demonstrate that his theory was sound.

On March 22, the Journal carried this brief notice:

"We understand that the steamboat *Talisman* had arrived at New Salem last evening. New Salem is 18 miles from this place by land and lies on the Sangamon River."

On March 24, Lincoln brought the steamer safely through to Springfield, and many of the people in the great assembly who gathered there to welcome it, got their first glimpse of the 6-foot-4 pilot who was to become within a few years the first citizen of the city.

A reception and dance was given in honor of the crew of the *Talisman*, and Lincoln could not have helped but be conspicuous in the celebration and evidently made much political capital out of the gathering.

The return of the steamer hastened by the rapidly falling Sangamon was made with difficulty and the boat was delayed at New Salem until part of the dam could be torn away to allow it to proceed.

The steamboat, *Talisman*, was short lived, as the following excerpt from the St. Louis Times, re-printed in the Sangamon Journal for May 3, 1832, reveals:

"On Monday evening last between the hours of 1 and 3 o'clock a fire broke out from the steamboat *Talisman*. . . . When the steamboat was discovered to be in flames it was lying near the offices of the American Fur Company. One of the crew made an ineffective attempt to scuttle her and then cast her adrift. She floated down to the

wharf in front of the store of Dan Lee and Company where she remained until entirely consumed."

The departure of Bogue, the promoter, was nearly as disastrous to some of the citizens as was the burning of the *Talisman* to the promoters. On August 25, a suit brought against him by Elizah Iles resulted in this notation:

"Bogue is indebted to him for the sum of \$541.65 and the said Bogue has deserted from the state."

Lincoln also suffered financial losses by the insolvency of Bogue. He had signed with Nelson Alley, tavern keeper at New Salem, one of the many subscription papers circulated in the interests of the *Talisman* venture. Alley defaulted and the burden of payment was thrown on Lincoln. He assumed this debt for \$104.87½ and in a reasonable time paid it in full. Although Lincoln had received \$40.00 for piloting the boat he was still the loser by more than \$60.00.

The story of the *Talisman* is told in doggerel by one of the Springfield bards in the issue of Sangamon Journal for April 5. The following three stanzas allow one to appreciate the tone of the effort in which Abraham Lincoln played a major part one hundred years ago.

"With Captain Collins at the helm
And Captain Collins to turn the bend
He turned them to, he turned them fro,
And the way he turned them wasn't
slow.

O clear the steamboat long bend, short
bend,
Young Illinois.

"O when we come to Salem dam
Up we went against it jam.
We tried to cross with all our might,
We couldn't do it, we stayed all night.
O clear the steamboat long bend, short
bend,
Young Illinois.

"O Captain Bogue who gave the load
O Captain Bogue who showed the road
And we came up with a right good
will
And tied our boat up to his mill.
O clear the steamboat long bend, short
bend,
Young Illinois."

Lincoln's river experiences were reviewed again when he became a candidate for the presidency in 1860 as is revealed in this excerpt from an Evansville, Indiana, paper:

"Old flatboat men claim him as one of their number and as he was a safe pilot in guiding hundreds of boats through the tortuous windings of the Father of Waters so they are quite willing to trust him with the helm of the ship of state."