

LINCOLN LORE

No. 173

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

August 1, 1932

LINCOLN LORE

BULLETIN OF
THE LINCOLN
HISTORICAL
RESEARCH
FOUNDATION



ENDOWED BY
THE LINCOLN
NATIONAL LIFE
INSURANCE
COMPANY

Dr. Louis A. Warren - - - Editor

LINCOLN'S POLITICAL APPRENTICESHIP

One hundred years ago this week Abraham Lincoln's name appeared for the first time as a candidate at an election. With reference to this contest he wrote in his autobiography prepared for Fell these words "Ran for the legislature the same year (1832) and was beaten—the only time I have ever been beaten by the people."

Much has been made of this defeat as one of the many barriers which stood in the way of Lincoln's progress. The very unusual support he was given, especially by the people in his own community, must have spurred him on to fuller efforts. The defeat, rather than depressing him, must have assumed the proportion of a victory.

In some respects this first political effort is one of the most remarkable evidences we have of Lincoln's ability to gather votes. When he announced as a candidate for the Legislature on March 9, 1832 he had been in the state of Illinois but two years and in the immediate community where he was then living but eight months.

With this comparatively short acquaintance he polled all but three of the 300 votes cast in the New Salem precinct and more than half of the votes cast in the entire county. Of the thirteen candidates with four to be elected he ran seventh just 159 votes behind the fourth man. This was in no sense a humiliating experience.

Many Lincoln biographers have pointed out that his service in the Black Hawk War was of very great political advantage to him, but it also had its drawbacks. He enlisted for service in the Black Hawk uprising about six weeks after he had announced as a candidate, and could not have done any further canvassing, except among the comparatively few men in the militia from Sangamon County, until about one week before the election. The disadvantage growing out of this absence during the very heart of the campaign would offset any contributing factor derived from his military service.

Years later he poked fun at General Cass for his attempting to use his military service as a political asset.

Lincoln said after referring to his own service in the Black Hawk War, which included charges on wild onions and bloody fights with mosquitoes, that he hoped that his friends would not poke fun at him by trying to make a military hero out of him. Lincoln's service in the Black Hawk War did not contribute so much to his political success as did his own personal appeal to the people.

One other incident which may have cost Lincoln a few votes was the fact that his name failed to appear in the paper as a candidate at least part of the time he was serving with the militia. The following excerpt from the Sangamon Journal for July 19, 1832 is explanatory:

"Some weeks ago we gave the candidates of this county (but omitted by accident the name of Captain Lincoln of New Salem), who were on the frontiers offering their lives in the service of their country. We then thought as we do now that any attack upon those citizens intended to operate against them either personally or politically should be repelled by those principles of moral rectitude which belongs to our citizens." There seems to have been a special political attack on General Henry at this time.

How early Lincoln's ambitions in the political field were stirred first we have no way of learning but when he reached the Illinois Country he was well versed on political issues and also a fluent speaker.

The very first election he attended at the age of twenty-one gave him the opportunity to serve as clerk. There are other instances recorded in the Sangamon Journal where he served as secretary at political meetings and his very active part in the political discussions of the day shows that his interest in politics was cultivated from his very earliest experiences.

One who will take time to read carefully the pages of the Sangamon Journal for the year 1832 will become convinced that this paper served as Lincoln's political primer. (See Lincoln Lore No. 152.) The policy of the paper, especially on local problems, evidently influenced the conclusions of Lincoln with respect to the tariff, internal improvements, banks, schools, etc. as his first political address clearly implies.

His apprenticeship was more extensive, however, than local interests and led him into a broader view of political issues than the average politician acquired.

Here in the Sangamon Journal, which in later years was called "Lincoln's Paper," he was able to acquaint himself with the arguments in the national political arena. A compilation of items Lincoln must have read in the Journal early in the year 1832 gives one some idea of the source

material on which he could draw for his public declarations.

January 5, 1832

A two column item on negro colonization in favor of the project.

Articles on Henry Clay for the presidency.

Effect of the message of the president on the United States Bank.

January 12

Colonization Society news.

Column on activities in Congress.

Editorial on Jackson.

The late Indian disturbances.

Address of the Republican Convention to the people of the United States.

January 19

Address of the Republican Convention continued (several columns).

January 26

Sketch of New Orleans.

February 2

Long article on railroads.

Bank of the United States discussed in Senate.

Steamboat Navigation.

February 9

Illinois-Michigan Railroad.

Announcement of George Farquar for the state Senate. (This is Farquar of lightning rod fame.)

February 16

Navigation of the Sangamon.

February 23

Mr. Clay's speech in the Senate.

Mr. Haynes' speech (contains two pages).

March 1

Mr. Webster's remarks upon Van Buren's nomination.

March 8

Mr. Adams and the tariff.

March 15

Thomas Moffat's address on temperance at Springfield Presbyterian Meeting House.

March 22

Mr. Clay's speech in Defense of the American System (four columns in this installment).

General Smith and Mr. Clay.

March 29

Continuation of Mr. Clay's speech (two pages).

April 5

Mr. Clay's speech concluded (two columns).

At this point Abraham Lincoln's reading of the Sangamon Journal may have been interrupted by his enlistment in the Black Hawk War but it is safe to say that his political apprenticeship in Illinois was served under the guidance of the editor of this early paper.