

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN IN WISCONSIN

A Wisconsin newspaper published in 1859 gives us one of the best early word portraits of Abraham Lincoln appearing in print. After having seen and heard Lincoln, the editor of *The Wisconsin Pinery* which was published at Stevens Point, under the caption "Old Abe," made the following observations:

"He looks as if he was made for wading in deep water. The women say he is homely,—I say he is handsome. He has a long nose, a wrinkled, clean-shaven face, large dark eyes, black eye-brows, a forehead that juts over his eyes like a cornice, long and full, sloping up into a wealth of black hair. He looks like an open-hearted, honest man who has grown sharp in fighting knaves. His face is swarthy and filled with very deep, long thought-wrinkles. He inspires confidence. His hearers feel sure that he will not lead them astray, or fail to make a point if he attempts to. I think he is very much like Clay, without the light complexion and fiery enthusiasm. His voice is not heavy, but has a clear trumpet tone that can be heard an immense distance."

This description was inspired by Lincoln's last visit to Wisconsin, although once and possibly twice before he had been within the boundaries of the state.*

Whitewater—1832

Abraham Lincoln's first visit to Wisconsin occurred when he was a member of a mounted company in the Black Hawk War known as an independent spy company. This was in 1832, and Lincoln was but twenty-three years of age. He crossed the state line near Beloit on June 30th, proceeded north, and was mustered out at a point near what is now Whitewater, Wisconsin, on July 10th.

The extent of this first visit to the state was about two weeks, and its climax must have been very disconcerting to Lincoln, as an incident which occurred at that time was indirectly responsible for his first and only political defeat at the hands of the people.

Lincoln, at the time he was mustered out, was a candidate for the Legislature of Illinois, and he intended to rise early the next morning, mount his horse, and hurry back to New Salem to put in a few days campaigning. When he awoke, however, he found someone had stolen his horse. The necessity of having to walk the three hundred miles, or most of it, back to New Salem so delayed him that he had little opportunity to present his political claims to the people, with the consequence that he was not elected.

Milwaukee, State Fair—1859

The occasion for Lincoln's visit to Wisconsin in 1859 was an address at the annual exhibition of the Wisconsin Agricultural Society. He arrived in Milwaukee on Thursday, September 29th, and spoke the following morning. The official report of the society printed this paragraph in its minutes:

"The Annual Address before the Society was delivered by the Hon. Abram Lincoln of Illinois, on Friday the 30th inst., at 11 o'clock and was universally regarded as a highly instructive and valuable production."

The complete address is printed in the transactions of the society, and many statements appearing in this speech are included among the best known Lincoln sayings. A few excerpts from the address follow:

"To correct the evils, great and small, which spring from want of sympathy and from positive enmity among strangers, as nations or as individuals, is one of the highest functions of civilization."

"Constituted as man is, he has positive need of occasional recreation, and whatever can give him this associated with virtue and advantage, and free from vice and disadvantage, is a positive good."

"I presume I am not expected to employ the time assigned me in the mere flattery of the farmers as a class. My opinion of them is that, in proportion to numbers, they are neither better nor worse than other people."

"The effect of thorough cultivation, upon the farmer's own mind, and in reaction through his mind back upon his business, is perhaps quite equal to any other of its effects. Every man is proud of what he does well, and no man is proud of that he does not well."

"I have not pointed out difficulties in order to discourage, but in order that, being seen, they may be the more readily overcome."

"They hold that labor is prior to, and independent of, capital; that, in fact, capital is the fruit of labor, and could never have existed if labor had not first existed; that labor can exist without capital, but that capital could never have existed without labor."

"The prudent, penniless beginner in the world labors for wages awhile, saves a surplus with which to buy tools or land for himself, then labors on his own account another while, and at length hires another new beginner to help him."

"Every blade of grass is a study; and to produce two where there was but one is both a profit and a pleasure."

Milwaukee, Newhall House—1859

While Lincoln's primary object in the Wisconsin visit was to speak at the State Fair, his political friends succeeded in persuading him to make an address on current events. On the evening of the same day he appeared at the fair, he addressed a group of people at the Newhall House. As far as can be learned, no fragments of this speech are available.

Beloit—1859

The day following the Milwaukee address, Abraham Lincoln was scheduled for a speech of a political nature at Beloit. The open air meeting which had been planned at 2 p. m. was made impossible by stormy weather, and the assembly gathered in Hanchett's Hall.

It is not likely that Lincoln used any manuscript on this occasion, and the remarks he made are only available in the words of the reporter who covered the meeting. It would seem from the digest of the speech appearing in the *Beloit Journal* that most of the address dealt with the slavery question. He is quoted as having said on this occasion "The Republican Party's underlying principle is hatred to the institution of slavery; hatred to it in all its aspects; moral, social and political." He closed with an eloquent appeal used with great effect by Henry Clay.

Janesville—1859

Another point touched on Lincoln's Wisconsin trip in 1859 was Janesville. On the evening of the same day he spoke at Beloit, he addressed a group at Janesville. It is evident from the brief digest made by the papers that his remarks were much the same as those made at Beloit. He spoke for an hour and a half.

This trip to Wisconsin in 1859 has had a strange aftermath. The manuscript which Lincoln used at the State Fair was given by Lincoln to the press and in turn the reporter distributed separate papers of it to friends. Consequently, it was scattered the length and breadth of the state. Because of the unique character of the text, each page is very valuable, and one discovering a page should be careful to preserve it.

*There is a tradition that Lincoln was in Wisconsin in the Fall of 1835, visiting Milwaukee, Sheboygan, and Port Washington. At the latter place he is said to have stopped two days and considered settling there. More definite evidence is needed, however, to include the points touched on this traditional itinerary among the places Lincoln visited in Wisconsin.