

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN IN SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS—1837

The city of Springfield, Illinois is in the midst of a two fold centennial celebration. It is commemorating the one hundredth anniversary of its legislative enactment as the state capital, and the one hundredth anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's arrival in the city to make his home there. Inasmuch as Lincoln was largely responsible for steering the new capital bill to a successful passage, the two anniversaries have much in common. In fact, Lincoln might be called the city's patron saint.

It is a strange coincidence, indeed, that on the very eve of the celebration, a letter should be discovered that Lincoln wrote in Springfield, on December 7, 1837. It is a mystery how such an important writing could be obscured for a hundred years.

The fortunate possessor of this rare letter is L. O. Schriver, of Peoria, Illinois, to whom it was recently presented. The importance of this correspondence, aside from the fact that it further confirms that Lincoln had a more adequate early training than has commonly been accepted, is the mention, possibly for the first time, of Stephen A. Douglas. A copy of the letter follows:

Springfield, Dec. 7, 1837

"Friend Minshall.

"I write this to say that it is Stuart's intention to be a candidate for congress again; and that he will be publicly announced before long. I would suggest to you the propriety of your letting our friends in your parts know that he is to be the candidate.

"On the receipt of this, write me all you know and all you think, in regard to our prospects for the race.

"I believe we have nothing here that would be news to you. I am ashamed to write so short a letter; but lack of material, you know, will explain (?) my being short.

"Your sincere friend

"A. Lincoln

"P. S. We have adopted it as part of our policy here, to never speak of Douglass at all. Isn't that the best mode(?) of treating so small a matter?"

The Lincoln National Life Foundation is also fortunate in having in its archives, a document of over fifty lines all in Lincoln's hand, written in October, 1837. There are very few writings of Lincoln's in existence as early as this date.

The place Lincoln occupied in the political history of Springfield is well illustrated by a letter written by him shortly after he took up his residence in the city:

Springfield, April 19, 1837.

"Levi Davis, Esq.,

"Friend Davis—The bearer of this, Dr. A. G. Henry, visits you for the purpose of drawing a small amount of money to enable the Commissioners to commence the erection of a State House. He, as you probably recollect, is one of the Building Commissioners. The Bond for the \$50,000, required by the act locating the Seat of Government, has been executed by several of our Citizens and duly approved by the Governor, and will be filed with the Treasurer by Dr. Henry on his Arrival at your Town. The Dr. being a Stranger to you and the Treasurer, and his duties being of a new kind, he has asked me to request you as friends to render him what as-

sistance you conveniently can. We have, generally in this Country, Peace, Health, and Plenty, and no News.

Very respectfully,

"A. Lincoln."

Lincoln did not succeed so well socially and there are letters available which throw some light on Lincoln's reaction towards living in town after having spent his whole life in very small communities.

At New Salem, Lincoln had made the acquaintance of Mary Owens, a Kentucky girl. December 13, 1836, he wrote to her from Vandalia, where he was then attending a session of the Legislature. Another letter was written to her on May 7, about five months later, which indicates that during this period, he had been keeping company with her. They were together again, as late as August 16, 1837, so it is evident the courtship lasted for at least eight months.

The letter written from Springfield, dated May 7, contains the following paragraph:

"This thing of living in Springfield is rather a dull business, after all; at least it is so to me. I am quite as lonesome here as I ever was anywhere in my life. I have been spoken to by but one woman since I have been here, and should not have been by her if she could have avoided it. I've never been to church yet, and probably shall not be soon. I stay away because I am conscious I should not know how to behave myself."

Later, in the same letter, he refers to Springfield as a "busy wilderness" which again implies how lonely he was. It is very likely he had a touch of real homesickness. The last sentence in the paragraph is pathetic indeed. The implication is, that he felt out of place in a community where there was culture and social decorum.

There is one other statement in the paragraph which illustrates how little Lincoln had participated in the social life of the community up to this time. He said "I have been spoken to by but one woman since I have been here, (a period of eight weeks) and should not have been by her if she could have avoided it."

It is barely possible this one woman may have been Mary Todd who was visiting in Springfield for the first time in the year, 1837. Lincoln's law partner, John T. Stuart, was a cousin of Mary Todd and it seems very likely that Mary would on some occasion, while in Springfield, step into the law office of her cousin. This site would offer the proper atmosphere for the episode, as related by Lincoln, where a casual meeting in a small office would almost compel a young lady to recognize her cousin's law partner.

It appears as if Springfield would do well to make their centennial celebration a triple centennial and include the coming of Mary Todd to Springfield as an event worth memorializing. She, more than any one individual, with the possible exception of his mother and step-mother contributed to Abraham Lincoln's development and preparation for the president's chair.