

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS LIQUOR

During the season in which national prohibition was in force there was much controversy as to the attitude Lincoln would have taken with respect to the use and sale of intoxicants. Since the old order has been restored there has been a tendency to call the business partnership into which Abraham Lincoln entered with a certain William Berry, a saloon enterprise and Lincoln, himself, a bar-keeper.

There has been circulated widely during the past few months a broadside which presents an enlargement of "The Abraham Lincoln Saloon License." A picture of Lincoln appears on this broadside advertisement with other data which would allow the casual observer to conclude that documentary evidence is now available to prove Lincoln's connection with the business. The many attempts made to emphasize the New Salem store incident, out of all due respect to its importance, has brought a number of inquiries to the Lincoln National Life Foundation about Lincoln's attitude towards liquor.

It is a fact that a license to operate a tavern was taken out in the name of Berry and Lincoln, March 6, 1833, and a bond for three hundred dollars as required by law was signed by Abraham Lincoln, (genuineness of signature questioned by some students) William F. Berry and Bowling Green. The license to operate this tavern, however, although issued in the firm's name of Berry and Lincoln was evidently issued to William F. Berry, as a copy of the license which appears below clearly states.

"Ordered that William F. Berry in the name of Berry and Lincoln have license to keep a tavern in New Salem to continue 12 months from this date and that they pay one dollar in addition to six dollars heretofore paid as per treasury receipt . . ."

During the Lincoln-Douglas debates at Ottawa on August 21, 1858, Douglas said that when he first became acquainted with his opponent, Lincoln was a "flourishing grocery-keeper in the town of Salem." Lincoln replied "The Judge is woefully at fault about his friend Lincoln being a 'grocery keeper'. I don't know that it would be a great sin, if I had been; but he is mistaken. Lincoln never kept a grocery anywhere in the world."

This clear unqualified statement that he was never engaged in dispensing liquor through distributing mediums known as groceries should for all time settle Lincoln's actual relation to any Berry-Lincoln firm so called, as far as his interest in the liquor license is concerned. It is known that within a short time after the license was issued to Berry, Lincoln sold his interest in the firm.

Temperance Address

There were two subjects on which Abraham Lincoln approached the roll of a reformer, slavery and liquor. You cannot read his references to either one without feeling that he was deeply moved by the injustice and sorrow which grew out of both institutions. While a young man in Springfield, Illinois he joined the Washington Temperance Society and became one of the leading exponents of total abstinence. One of his lectures given at Springfield on February 22, 1842, has been preserved and a few excerpts from it follow:

"In my judgment such of us as have never fallen victims have been spared more by the absence of appetite

than from any mental or moral superiority over those who have . . .

"Turn now to the temperance revolution. In it we shall find a stronger bondage, a viler slavery unmitigated, a greater tyrant deposed; in it, more of want supplied, more disease healed, more sorrow assuaged. By it, no orphans starving, no widows weeping. By it, none wounded in feeling, none injured in interest; even the dram-maker and dram-seller will have glided into other occupations so gradually as never to have felt the change, and will stand ready to join all others in the universal song of gladness. And what a noble ally this to the cause of political freedom; with such an aid its march cannot fail to be on and on, till every son of earth shall drink in rich fruition the sorrow-quenching draughts of perfect liberty. Happy day when—all appetites controlled, all poisons subdued, all matter subjected—mind, all conquering mind, shall live and move, the monarch of the world. Glorious consummation! Hail, fall of fury! Reign of reason, all hail!

"And when the victory shall be complete,—when there shall be neither a slave nor a drunkard on the earth,—how proud the title of that land which may truly claim to be the birthplace and the cradle of both those revolutions that shall have ended in that victory. How nobly distinguished that people who shall have planted and nurtured to maturity both the political and moral freedom of their species."

Presidential Nominee

The incident which emphasizes Lincoln's temperate habits better than any other at the time he was nominated for the presidency was the serving of cold water to the members of the notification committee upon their visit to Springfield. He received a letter from a friend asking about the incident to which he made this reply:

"Having kept house sixteen years, and having never held the "cup" to the lips of my friends then, my judgment was that I should not, in my new position, change my habit in this respect. What actually occurred upon the occasion of the committee visiting me, I think it would be better for others to say."

Sons of Temperance

On September 29, 1863, Abraham Lincoln received members of an organization known as Sons of Temperance and in reply to their appeal for the advancement of the cause of temperance in the army said in part:

"When I was a young man—long ago—before the Sons of Temperance as an organization had an existence—I, in a humble way, made temperance speeches, and I think I may say that to this day I have never, by my example, belied what I then said."

This statement verifies in his own words that he had himself throughout life followed the course of total abstinence which he advocated more than twenty years before. He also made one other statement to the visiting delegation which was borrowed from his temperance speech of long ago.

"I think that the reasonable men of the world have long since agreed that intemperance is one of the greatest, if not the very greatest, of all evils among mankind. That is not a matter of dispute, I believe. That the disease exists, and that it is a very great one, is agreed upon by all."