

# LINCOLN LORE

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## EARLIEST PRINTED LINCOLN PAMPHLET

Among the many rare pamphlets in the collection of the Lincoln National Life Foundation, is a three page report made before the Illinois legislature on January 17, 1839 by "Mr. Lincoln, from the Committee on Finance". As far as we know, this is the earliest printed pamphlet with complete text submitted by Lincoln. If there is another copy preserved, its whereabouts is not known. The contents of the pamphlet are not published in any of the compilations of Lincoln's writings, so it is here printed in full.

Ill. Legis. } H. R. } 11th Assem.

### PUBLIC LANDS IN ILLINOIS.

January 17, 1839.

Read, laid on the table, and ordered to be printed.

Mr. Lincoln, from the Committee on Finance, made the following

#### REPORT:

*The Committee on Finance, to which was referred a resolution of this House instructing them to inquire into the expediency of proposing to purchase of the Government of the United States all the unsold lands lying within the limits of the State of Illinois, have had the same under consideration, and report:*

That, in their opinion, if such purchase could be made on reasonable terms, two objects of high importance to the State might thereby be effected—first, acquire control over all the territory within the limits of the State—and, second, acquire an important source of revenue.

We will examine these two points in their order, and with special reference to their bearing upon our internal improvement system.

In the first place, then, we are now so far advanced in a general system of internal improvements that, if we would, we cannot retreat from it without disgrace and great loss. The conclusion then is, that we must advance; and, if so, the first reason for the State acquiring title to the public land is, that while we are at great expense in improving the country, and thereby enhancing the value of all the real property within its limits, that enhancement may attach exclusively to property owned by ourselves as a State, or to its citizens as individuals, and not to that owned by the Government of the United States. Again, it is conceded every where, as we believe, that Illinois surpasses every other spot of equal extent upon the face of the globe, in fertility of soil, and in the proportionable amount of the same which is sufficiently level for actual cultivation; and consequently that she is endowed by nature with the capacity of sustaining a greater amount of agricultural wealth and population than any other equal extent of territory in the world. To such an amount of wealth and population, our internal improvement system, now so alarming, in view of its having to be borne by our present numbers, and with our present means, would be a burden of no sort of consequence. How important, then, is it that all our energies should be exerted to bring that wealth and population among us as speedily as possible. But what, it may be asked, can the ownership of the land by the State do towards the accomplishment of that desirable object? It may be answered that the chief obstruction to the more rapid settlement of our country is found in the fact that so much of our best lands lie so remote from timber—an obstruction that, did our State but own those lands, our Legislature might do much towards removing, by extending encouragement in the shape of donations, exemptions from ordinary burdens, or otherwise, to the rearing and cultivating of timber, or to the invention of means of building and enclosure that might dispense with the present profuse use of timber. This, then, is another rea-

son why the State should desire the control of all the land within its limits.

Looking to these lands in the second point of view, to wit, as a source of revenue, your committee submit the following: There are now of unsold lands in the State of Illinois, twenty millions of acres, more or less. Should we purchase all of them, at twenty-five cents per acre, they would cost us five millions of dollars. This sum we might borrow, and the proceeds of the sales of the lands, at the present price of \$1.25 per acre, would repay the principal, together with the interest thereon, at five per cent., for thirty years, and one-half the lands still be left us.

In a very short time we shall have contracted a very heavy debt for the construction of public works; and yet those works will remain for a time so incomplete as to return us nothing; meanwhile the interest upon our debt must be paid. When this juncture shall arrive (as surely it will) we shall find ourselves at a point which may aptly be likened to the dead point in the steam-engine—a point extremely difficult of turning—but which, when once turned, will present no further difficulty, and all will again be well. The aid that we might derive in that particular juncture, by the purchase of the public lands, affords, in the opinion of the committee, the strongest reason for making that purchase. The annual proceeds of the sales of those lands, should the subsequent sales bear any proportion to those of former times, will pay the interest on the loan created for their own purchase, and also upon many millions of our internal improvement loans; and that, too, at that particular time when we shall have but very small, if any other means of paying it. And finally, when our public works shall be completed, and consequently able to sustain themselves, the proceeds of the sales of the lands may be diverted to the payment of the original debt contracted for the purchase of them. To show that we are not mistaken in saying that the proceeds of the sales of the lands will annually pay the interest on their own loan, and also on a large amount of the internal improvement loan, it is only necessary to state that the interest on the land loan would be but five hundred thousand dollars, annually, and that the proceeds of the sales of the public lands in this State have, in one instance, been about three millions a year, (the committee speak from memory only;) so that, should the average of the subsequent sales be half as large, we still should have left one million annually, to pay interest on our internal improvement debt.

The only remaining question is, whether there is any probability of the General Government accepting such a proposal. We think there are some reasons for believing it would. It would relieve the General Government from a perpetual source of expensive and vexatious legislation, which, perhaps, annually absorbs one-tenth it receives from that source of revenue. She would receive of us, at once, and without trouble, five millions of dollars—a sum one-third part as large as she paid a foreign government for the Louisiana territory, then including what now are the States of Louisiana, Arkansas, and Missouri—and receive it, too, after having received of us, for lands already sold, a sum equal to the whole sum paid for the Louisiana territory; and she would receive that five millions of dollars at a time when she is in most particular need of money.

But should your committee be mistaken; should there be no probability of the General Government accepting our proposal, still, it is believed no evil can follow the making it.

The committee, therefore, submit the following resolutions:

*Resolved by the General Assembly of the State of Illinois.* That the said State propose to purchase of the Government of the United States all the lands not sold or otherwise disposed of, within the limits of said State, at the rate of twenty-five cents per acre, to be paid (unless otherwise agreed upon) at such time as the said Government of the United States shall deliver over to the authorities of the said State of Illinois all the plats, fieldnotes, &c., pertaining to the surveys of said lands.

*Resolved.* That the faith of the said State of Illinois is hereby irrevocably pledged to carry into effect the foregoing proposal, if the Government of the United States shall accept the same within two years from the passage hereof.

*Resolved.* That our Senators in Congress be instructed, and our Representatives requested, to use their best exertions to procure the passage of a law or resolution of Congress accepting the foregoing proposal.

*Resolved.* That the Governor be requested to transmit a copy of the foregoing resolutions to each of our Senators and Representatives in Congress.