

LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Number 797

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

July 17, 1944

RECONSTRUCTING THE "LOST SPEECH"

Students of history have not given up entirely the hope that eventually there may be discovered enough fragments of the address made by Abraham Lincoln on May 29, 1856, and at other times during the campaign that followed, to reconstruct a more satisfactory "Lost Speech" than is now available.

The first attempt to improvise the "Lost Speech" was not made until forty years after it was delivered. Henry C. Whitney claimed to have taken some notes at the time the speech was made, but waited until 1896 before he attempted to interpret and enlarge upon them. The results of his venture were first published in *McClures Magazine*, for September, 1896.

On May 29, 1900, four years after the publication of Whitney's version, there was a largely attended meeting at Bloomington arranged as a memorial of the convention held there in 1856. The printed proceedings of 184 pages included reminiscences of many who were present at the original convention. The last page of the book takes notice of Whitney's version of the "Lost Speech" with this comment. "Lately there has been published a 'Lost Speech' made up from alleged notes. The McLean County Historical Society does not think it proper to send out a report of this reunion without stating that in this community, where many now living heard the great speech and where Mr. Lincoln was so well known and loved, all of his friends consider the speech still lost."

In 1923 Dr. W. E. Barton spoke at Bloomington, and remarked, "I believe that the 'Peoria Speech' must have contained the bone and sinew of the Bloomington Speech which is known as Lincoln's 'Lost Speech'."

A more recent review of Whitney's effort by Paul Angle, appeared in the December, 1930, bulletin of the Abraham Lincoln Association, in which the author stated, "It is difficult to draw any other conclusion than that the Whitney version of Lincoln's 'Lost Speech' is so largely a product of the imagination that it is entirely unreliable."

Before any attempt is made to point out some salient points which Lincoln must have touched upon at Bloomington, it must be admitted that it will never be possible to capture any of the historic atmosphere which contributed tremendously to the power of the speaker. The dynamic setting inspired the speaker to such an extent that words which came forth spontaneously reached a pinnacle of emotional oratory which probably he never achieved before or after that supreme effort.

While Whitney's notes were not revived for forty years after they were written, George T. Brown, editor of the *Alton Express*, who was present at the convention, published the following week a brief summary of what Lincoln said. It is apparent from the brevity of the sentences that they were jotted down at the time the speech was delivered. They were not discovered until 1930, but they constitute the most reliable source with which to start rebuilding the "Lost Speech." These are the important sentences which give us some idea of the content, although they are far too fragmentary to make possible an adequate reconstruction of the entire speech.

"He enumerated the pressing reasons of the present movement.

"He was here ready to fuse with anyone who would unite with him to oppose slave power.

"Spoke of the bugbear of disunion which was so vaguely threatened.

"It was to be remembered that the Union must be preserved in the purity of its principles as well as in the integrity of territorial parts.

"It must be 'Liberty and Union now and forever, one and inseparable.'

"The sentiment in favor of (white?) slavery now prevailed in all the slave state papers, except those of Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri and Maryland. Such was the progress of National Democracy.

"Douglas once claimed against him that Democracy favored more than his principles, the individual rights of man. Was it not strange that he must stand there now to defend those rights against their former eulogist?

"The Black Democracy were endeavoring to cite Henry Clay to reconcile old Whigs to their doctrine and repaid them with the very cheap compliment of National Whigs."

An autobiographical sketch which Lincoln prepared in the third person contains this interesting summary with respect to the part he played in the Fremont campaign, "In the canvass of 1856 Mr. Lincoln made over fifty speeches no one of which so far as he remembers was put in print." We might assume that these campaign speeches would follow along the same general lines as the "Lost Speech," which had struck such a responsive chord.

It is observed that all of these speeches were made between the national convention in Philadelphia, June 19, and election day, November 4. This was a period of approximately four months and a half which would necessitate Lincoln making an average of three speeches a week. Inasmuch as these addresses must provide data for a reconstructed "Lost Speech" the importance of making a list of them is apparent. Through the detailed study of this period made by The Abraham Lincoln Association, we are able to tabulate thirty-eight of these speaking appointments. The schedule thus far compiled follows:

June 23, Urbana; July 4, Princeton, 17, Dixon, 18, Sterling, 19, Chicago, 23, Galena; August 2, Springfield, 6, Paris, 7, Grand View, 8, Charleston, 9, Shelbyville, 16, Oregon, 27, Kalamazoo, Mich., 30, Petersburg; September, 2, Lincoln, 4, Atlanta, 6, Jacksonville and Springfield, 8, Springfield, 12, Bloomington, 16, Bloomington, 17, Urbana, 23, Vandavia, 24, Decatur, 25, Springfield, 30, Lacon; October 2, Alton, 7, Ottawa, 8, Joliet, 9, Peoria, 13, Clinton, 18, Belville, 20, Urbana, 21, West Urbana, 23, Atlanta, 26, Pittsfield, 28, Springfield, 31, Springfield.

Certainly there must have been preserved by the local papers some extracts from these thirty-eight addresses.

It will be observed from this list that Lincoln spoke without the state but once during the campaign, and strange to say, it was the speech made at Kalamazoo, Michigan, which may prove to be the basic transcript in any attempt to determine the subject matter in the Bloomington effort. The text of the Kalamazoo speech is relatively a recent discovery, and was not made available to Lincoln students, in general, until three years ago when Thomas I. Starr, of Detroit, reproduced it in a limited edition of a beautifully bound brochure, entitled, *Lincoln's Kalamazoo Address*.

Of course, Mr. Lincoln, in 1860, did not know that his speech at Kalamazoo had been put in print. It was a reporter of the *Detroit Daily Advertiser* who had sense enough to take down Lincoln's remarks, although there is evidence the notes suffered much from the blue pencil cancellations. It is thus far Lincoln's only address preserved, contemporary with the "Lost Speech," in 1856, but invaluable in supplementing the brief synopsis published in the *Alton Express*.

It is hoped that this issue of *Lincoln Lore* will invite a further search for any fragments of the "Lost Speech" or contemporary speeches by Lincoln which may be in hiding.