

# LINCOLN LORE

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## CENTENNIAL OF LINCOLN'S VISIT TO THE BAY STATE

The month of September presents a series of centennial anniversaries in the Life of Abraham Lincoln that are too important to overlook. In the year 1848, beginning with September 12th and concluding with September 22nd, Lincoln paid his first visit to the Bay State. With the exception of Sunday, the 17th, he made one or more political addresses each day, speaking in as many as nine Massachusetts cities.

The significance of this visit has not as yet been fully appreciated. Besides giving Lincoln an opportunity of appearing before several cultural audiences and meeting some of the first citizens of the state, it allowed him to brush up against what might be called the intelligensia of his day. A prepared address before a group of distinguished people in Boston offered an entirely different approach than an extemporaneous stump speech before a community of pioneers in Illinois. The altogether favorable reaction which Lincoln's speeches brought from these groups of highly intelligent people in Massachusetts, must have assured him that he might eventually extend his political horizon.

The occasion of Lincoln's visit was an attempt to advance Zachary Taylor's candidacy for the Presidency, on the Whig ticket. The Free Soil Party had been making considerable headway in proselyting the Whigs of New England, and a large number of anti-slavery men had already gone over to the Free Soilers and Van Buren, their candidate for the Presidency. The fact that Massachusetts' favorite son, Daniel Webster, previously had come out in opposition to Taylor, also called for drastic action.

It would seem from the best evidence available that Lincoln was sent to Massachusetts by the Whig National Committee, in whose office at Washington he had been working since the adjournment of Congress, in the interests of Taylor's candidacy for the Presidency.

Previous to this visit it is known that he had been carrying on correspondence with William Schouler, editor and publisher of the *Boston Daily Atlas*, an influential Whig organ in New England, and upon reaching Boston he visited Schouler in his office. The fact that no direct invitation in writing has been discovered, asking Lincoln to come to Boston, is not sufficient grounds to assume that Lincoln went on his own initiative. A search through the Robert Lincoln collection of his father's papers fails to throw any light on the question.

Lincoln's schedule, which may have originally included but one of the Boston addresses, was extended to such proportions that before he started home he had spoken in the following cities: Sept. 12 and 13, Town Hall and Foster St. Station respectively, Worcester; Sept. 14, Liberty Hall, New Bedford; Sept. 15, Washington Hall, Boston; Sept. 16, City Hall, Lowell; Sept. 18, Richmond Hall, Dorchester; Sept. 19, Gerrish Hall, Chelsea; Sept. 20, Temperance Hall, Dedham; Sept. 21, Union Hall, Taunton, Mass.; and finally on Sept. 22, Tremont Temple, Boston.

According to the editor of the *Boston Atlas*, Mr. Lincoln could have greatly prolonged his Massachusetts schedule. On the Monday after his appearance at Boston the paper

contained this notice, "In answer to the many applications which we daily receive from different parts of the State for this gentleman to speak, we have to say that he left Boston on Saturday morning on his way home to Illinois."

There were some episodes connected with his Massachusetts itinerary a century ago which were of far reaching importance as they reacted upon Lincoln himself. The enthusiastic reception with which his speeches were received was one phase of the itinerary he would not soon forget. The press carried with reference to his addresses such expressions as "hard to beat," "seldom heard equalled," "very eloquent," "brilliant illustrations," "frequent applause," "masterly," "agreeable and entertaining," "direct to the point," "capital effect," "model speech," and at Tremont Temple, Boston, his speech was described as "powerful and convincing and cheered to the echo."

Mr. N. F. Safford, who introduced the speaker at the Dorchester meeting stated that Mr. Lincoln was "one of the Lincolns of Hingham, and a descendant of Gen. Benjamin Lincoln." Abraham Lincoln prefaced his remarks by disclaiming descent from the Revolutionary General but said he had "endeavored in Illinois to introduce the principles of the Lincolns of Massachusetts."

A social gathering during the Worcester visit reveals how the Illinois Whig was introduced into a new cultural environment. He was a dinner guest of Levi Lincoln, oldest living former governor of Massachusetts. Several distinguished citizens of the state were present including, Ex-Governor Gardner who states: "I well remember the jokes between Governor Lincoln and Abraham Lincoln as to their presumed relationship. At last the latter said: 'I hope we both belong, as the Scotch say, to the same clan, but I *know* one thing, and that is, that we are both good Whigs.'"

One of the strangest coincidences of the Massachusetts visit occurred at the Boston meeting, where Lincoln appeared on the program with William H. Seward. Lincoln's only speeches in Boston were on this visit, and the one and only speech Seward ever made there was at the Tremont Temple meeting. The audience could not have anticipated that they were hearing at Tremont Temple that night the two foremost candidates for the leadership of a political party which was not then in existence.

If Lincoln went to Massachusetts with any personal inferiority complex, he was able to shake it off when he observed the reaction to his addresses by men of intellectual attainment. On the other hand he must have become conscious, possibly for the first time, of the passing of the Whig Party, with its potential leadership rallying around new anti-slavery units. The Whigs were to make one mighty effort, elect their candidate for the Presidency, and then fade out as a major political force.

It is to be regretted that all of these places where Lincoln spoke are not marked. As far as we can learn the bronze tablet on the site of Washingtonian Hall in Boston is the only memorial which now calls attention to this important visit of Abraham Lincoln to the Bay State a century ago.