

LINCOLN LORE

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CATCHING THE NATIONAL EYE

Steps to the Wigwam, No. 4

The state political gathering at Bloomington, Illinois on May 29, 1856, put Abraham Lincoln definitely on the track for a high place among national leaders in the newly organized Republican Party. While still under the spell of Lincoln's Lost Speech, delegates from Illinois were planning to attend the first nation wide convention of the party to be held in Philadelphia on June 19. There seems to have been little emphasis placed on the proximity of the Bloomington and Philadelphia dates, only three weeks intervening between these two steps in Lincoln's approach to the Wigwam. There can be little doubt but what Lincoln's Lost Speech at Bloomington was the immediate cause for pushing him forward at Philadelphia as a candidate for the vice-presidency on the proposed ticket of the newly organized party. It was the enthusiasm at Bloomington which carried over to Philadelphia and resulted in Lincoln catching the national eye.

The best tangible evidence we have of the effectiveness of the Lost Speech, as it was given wide acclaim by word of mouth at least, is the remarkable and almost phenomenal number of votes Lincoln received for the second place on the national ticket. Lincoln's first and only defeat at the hands of the people where he made his first race for the Illinois Legislature in 1832 was in reality a great psychological victory, as it convinced him that he had the potentialities of a vote gatherer.

While Lincoln did not receive the nomination at Philadelphia, the size of the complimentary vote he received must have reacted on him nationally in much the same way as the 1832 vote influenced him locally. In other words, the Philadelphia convention was the first sounding board which gave him some dependable evidence that his reputation as an outstanding leader in the new political alignment was taking on national significance.

There appeared in the January 17, 1856 issue of the *Era* at Washington, D. C. a call to "the Republicans of the Union to meet in informal convention in Pittsburgh, on the 22nd of February, 1856, for the purpose of perfecting the National Organization. Another objective was the providing for a National Delegate Convention of the Republican Party at a subsequent day to nominate candidates for the presidency and vice-presidency, to be supported at the election in November 1856."

There also appeared in the same paper under the same date a letter addressed to the "Friends of the Republican Movement Throughout the United States." Emphasizing the importance of taking a stand on "the only great issue now before the country—slavery or freedom" the appeal was closed with this exhortation: "Let us again urge the importance of an immediate and thorough organization."

The five eastern states of Main, Vermont, Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania joined with the four western states of Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, and Wisconsin in putting in motion this national effort. Illinois is especially noticeable because of her absence in the list, having failed in 1854 to perfect a Republican organization. Undoubtedly it was this announcement that set in motion the plans of the Anti-Nebraska editors' meeting at Decatur to convene on the same day, February 22, that had been set apart for the Pittsburgh meeting. Lincoln as we have observed heretofore in this series was a guest of the editors, and their chief adviser at Decatur.

The Pittsburgh convention assembled in Lafayette Hall was called to order by Lawrence Brainerd of Vermont, and John A. King of New York was made temporary chairman. Rev. Owen Lovejoy, who was present as a representative from Illinois, gave the invocation. Francis P. Blair of Maryland was named President with 23 vice-presidents, two from Illinois, John H. McMillan and John

C. Vaughn. Vaughn was also appointed on the committee on resolutions. The committee on national organization consisted of one member from each state with Owen Lovejoy the representative from Illinois, and George W. Julian, the Indiana member, became chairman. The appointment of a National Executive Committee, one from each state, with E. D. Morgan of New York, chairman, chose E. D. Leland as its Illinois member. Henry J. Raymond of the *New York Times* is said to have been the author of the report from the Committee on Resolutions. The 17th of June was named as the date of the national convention at Philadelphia "for the nomination of candidates for the Presidency and Vice-Presidency."

The delegates to the Convention from Illinois were: George Schneider, Chicago; Jesse O. Norton, Joliet; J. D. Arnold, Peoria; George T. Brown, Alton; J. B. Tenny, Atlanta; Miles S. Henry, Sterling; M. P. Sweet, Freeport; S. M. Church, Rockport; W. A. Little, Elizabeth; Cyrus Aldrich, Dixon; Edward R. Allan, Aurora; N. B. Judd, Chicago; W. H. L. Wallace, Ottawa; Owen Lovejoy, Princeton; A. W. Mack, Kankakee; T. J. Pickett, Peoria; A. C. Harding, Monmouth; W. P. Myers, New Boston; John Tilson, Quincy; William Ross, Pittsfield; W. G. Wilcox, Fredericksville; John M. Palmer, Carlville; Henry Grove, Peoria; S. C. Parks, Lincoln; Isaac Whitaker, Carlville; H. C. Johns, Decatur; Leander Muncell, Paris; William B. Archer, Marshall; M. G. Atwood, Alton; Francis Grimm, Belleville; F. A. Carpenter, Belleville; David Welty, Dixon; H. Krisman, Chicago; George W. Wait, St. Charles.

Among the above Illinois delegates one will observe many of those who attended the state convention and evidently they were the promoters of Lincoln's candidacy, John M. Palmer, apparently taking the lead.

John Allison of Pennsylvania, who had been directing the McLean forces at the convention and had been somewhat disappointed at the result, was asked to put Lincoln's name in nomination for the Vice-Presidency. He did so in a brief but pleasing way. Possibly some of the Lincoln strength may be credited to a desire to placate Allison. When the trial ballot was taken, however, only 11 of the 76 Pennsylvania delegates voted for Lincoln. It was in the New England states where Lincoln surprised his opponents, New Hampshire giving him 8 of the 15 votes, and from Massachusetts where he made several speeches in 1847, he received 7 votes.

As might be expected it was in the west where Lincoln garnered most of his strength with Illinois' entire vote of 33, 26 of Indiana's 39, and all of California's 12. The total of 110 votes were rather impressive. Although Dayton the successful candidate secured 253, Lincoln's closest competitor was Nathan P. Banks of Massachusetts with 46 votes, and 12 other contestants followed.

During the official ballot the New England states cast their votes for Dayton, except Connecticut who gave Lincoln 4 votes. New York increased her vote for Lincoln from 3 to 14 but Pennsylvania cut her Lincoln vote from 11 to 2. As soon as Judge Palmer of Illinois could get the floor he withdrew Lincoln's name. Kentucky announced she was about to give part of her vote to Lincoln but would now give it all to Dayton. The informal speeches made in nominating Lincoln and withdrawing his name brought him before the convention in an impressive way.

The steps which Lincoln took to the Wigwam were not unrelated stepping stones, so isolated that they caused the traveler considerable exertion to jump from one to the other. They were in fact closely associated episodes which accounted for a gradual and methodical elevation until the presidential chair itself was made ready for the reception of the new Washington executive who had once been known in the capital city as "the long Whig from Illinois."