

# LINCOLN LORE

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## LINCOLN'S FIRST RECORDED TOAST

The announcement on August 1 by Rutgers University Press of the forthcoming compilation, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, has created a new interest in what Lincoln wrote and said. The editor of *Lincoln Lore* has just come across in a rare pamphlet, a brief toast spoken by Lincoln at a banquet in Springfield in early March 1837. It does not appear in any of the hitherto published compilations of Lincoln's writings and speeches but we anticipate it has not escaped the compilers of the new nine volume work to be released on February 12, 1953.

Abraham Lincoln, although a resident of Illinois but two years and having lived but one year in the county where he then resided, on March 9, 1832 announced as a candidate for the legislature from Sangamon. A series of incidents; enlistment in militia, absence from district with military company, the stealing of his horse, and the leaving out by the press of his name among the candidates thwarted Lincoln's first attempt to enter politics.

During the session of the legislature that followed it was enacted that a popular vote be taken in the summer of 1834 to decide the location of the permanent state capital, the seat of government then being located at Vandalia. Public opinion was quite evenly divided with Alton, Vandalia, and Springfield separated by a few more than a thousand votes, so the result was anything but decisive.

Lincoln again announced as a candidate for the legislature in 1834 and was successful in being elected. He took his seat at Vandalia in December of that year and with the other eight members of the Sangamon County delegation known as the "Long Nine" began the attempt to bring the state capital to Springfield. Although a novice in politics Lincoln apparently was selected to line up as many of the legislators for Springfield as possible. Reelected to the legislature in 1836 he immediately was made the Whig floor leader, which further enhanced the chances of Springfield to gain the coveted prize. The first task was to rescind the law calling for a choice by popular vote.

The supreme test of the removal question came on February 28, 1837 when the state legislature voted to change the site of the state capital from Vandalia to Springfield. This achievement was realized on the fourth ballot. On the first ballot Springfield received 35 votes, more than twice as many as Vandalia where the seat of government was then located and which proved to be her closest competitor. With increases on both the third and fourth ballot recordings, substantial gains were made by Springfield. The required majority of votes, seventy-three, was

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Abraham Lincoln

reached on the fourth and final ballot. The other contenders are listed with the number of votes cast for them on the decisive ballot: Vandalia 16, Jacksonville 11, Peoria 8, Alton 6, Illiopolis 3 and scattering 6.

The necessary number of votes did not come however, without additional promises on the part of the Sangamon delegation and not without some amendments in the original bill. Historians generally concede that it was the diplomacy and sagacity of Abraham Lincoln that was largely responsible for the victory. Of course he was ably supported by the other members of the Sangamon delegation known as "The Long Nine" because they were extremely tall men. The group, with age of each member at the time of the state capital legislation in 1837 was as follows: John Dawson, 45; William F. Elkin, 44; Job Fletcher, 43; Archer G. Herndon, 41; Daniel Stone, 37; Andrew McCormick, 35; Robert L. Wilson, 31; Ninian W. Edwards, 28; and Abraham Lincoln, 28. The last two mentioned were to become brothers-in-law upon Lincoln's marrying Mary Todd, sister of Mrs. Edwards. The session

of the legislature which voted to change the seat of government from Vandalia to Springfield came to a close by a vote for adjournment at 7:00 p.m. on the night of March 6th.

When Springfield heard the results of the balloting there was great rejoicing and plans were made for properly receiving the nine members of the legislature from Sangamon who had contributed to the effort and other representatives at Vandalia who had supported the cause. This banquet was held at Spottswood's Rural Hotel and J. C. Power in his *History of Springfield* published in 1871 mentions the festivities as follows:

"Early in 1837 a public festival was held in Springfield in honor of the legislature for the removal of the capital. Toasts and speeches followed the dinner. Among many others I find the following by Abraham Lincoln, Esq.

"All our Friends—They are too numerous to mention now, individually, while there is no one of them who is not too dear to be forgotten or neglected."

If further proof is needed to support the claim that Lincoln was the chief contact man in the drive for the capital the fact that he was given the toast "All our friends" would seem to supply such evidence. As far as we can learn this is Lincoln's first recorded toast and as such makes a valuable contribution to that interesting collection of occasional remarks which came from his lips.

Many Lincoln authors have stressed the slowness with which Lincoln advanced but certainly it does not apply to his early political years in Illinois. Within the short space of three years he had risen from an obscure youth in an insignificant hamlet of Illinois to the first citizen, politically speaking, of the newly chosen state capital city of Illinois where he had just taken residence. It may be more than a coincident that on March 1, 1837, the day after the vote in the legislature, Abraham Lincoln received a certificate authorizing him to practice law in the courts of Illinois.