

# LINCOLN LORE

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

Number 1328

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

September 20, 1954

## LINCOLN'S IMPORTANT VISITS TO BLOOMINGTON, ILLINOIS

There is no city in Illinois where Abraham Lincoln had more influential acquaintances than at Bloomington. While his home city contained his wife's relatives, his law partners and some friends including Joshua Speed, the men who were primarily responsible for his advancement in national politics were residents of the McLean County Seat. David Davis, Jesse W. Fell and Leonard Swett were the most prominent of his associates there. A review of some of Lincoln's important visits to Bloomington has been suggested by the one hundredth anniversary this week of an episode which occurred there. In some respects it set the stage for a series of political contacts which eventually placed Lincoln in the President's chair.

Bloomington, established in 1831, is situated about sixty miles northeast of Springfield. In Lincoln's day it was connected with the state capital, first by stage coach and later by the Chicago division of the Illinois Central Railroad. However, Lincoln's earliest visits were apparently made on horseback.

### MAY 1838

Lincoln's first trip to Bloomington seems to have been at the session of the McLean Circuit Court which began on May 7, 1838. At least this is the earliest date for which we have documentary proof of his presence there. The *Sangamon Journal* on May 5 carried this announcement: "Our bills for McLean County are made out, and settlement can be made with A. Lincoln, Esq. who will be present at the term of the circuit court in Bloomington, next week. Our friends will oblige us by attending to this notice."

### SEPTEMBER 1851

Most of Lincoln's visits to Bloomington as might be surmised came within the scope of his routine professional business as he followed the Eighth Judicial Circuit. It was organized in 1847 with fourteen counties, reduced in 1853 to eight counties, and in 1857 to five counties. This last revision placed McLean County without the circuit but Lincoln continued to attend the sessions of the court there. During the periodical visits to Bloomington over the years the town had watched Lincoln's local political development. Later they witnessed his election to Congress and then noted his withdrawal from the political scene. In the meantime he had made many friends at Bloomington. At the September 1851 session of the court he became more closely allied with the town by purchasing two house lots there.

### September 1854

It was the September 1854 visit of Lincoln to Bloomington already mentioned in the introduction which opened the way for subsequent engagements of unusual political importance. Lincoln had been greatly moved by the annulment of the Missouri Compromise and had promised to help Richard Yates secure his reelection to Congress. Bloomington, however, was not in Yates' congressional district so when Lincoln consented to give a political address there, it revealed that his political horizon was almost immediately widened and his mission extended somewhat beyond the election of his friend Yates. His broader interest was possibly due to a speech Stephen A. Douglas had made in Chicago on September 1. The enthusiastic reception of Lincoln's speech at Bloomington on the Nebraska question encouraged him to accept speaking opportunities on the same question at other points and soon he found himself an ambassador at

large for the new political movement in the west that pointed towards a new political party. The climax of his effort might be said to have been reached at Bloomington two years later.

### MAY 1856

A state convention of the anti-Nebraska sympathizers was called for Bloomington on May 29, 1856. The convention was held in Mayor's Hall. Richard Yates spoke in the morning and after Orville H. Browning and Owen Lovejoy had spoken in the afternoon they were followed by Abraham Lincoln. This was the speech that has become known to Lincoln students as "The Lost Speech" inasmuch as no recording seems to have been made of it. It is said that Lincoln's eloquence on this occasion was never surpassed by him. The Bloomington convention marked the birth of the Republican Party in Illinois.

### JUNE 1857

Lincoln's most important client at the time his renewed political interest began to find expression was the Illinois Central Railroad. While at Bloomington on Friday, Sept. 14, 1856 Lincoln drew on the Railroad for \$150 due him for fees of \$10 each in fifteen cases. However, when this client later on tried to settle with Lincoln on a picayune basis for his work on the extremely important McLean County Tax case, Lincoln demurred. He sued the railroad for \$5,000 which was awarded him by a jury on June 23, minus the \$200 retainer fee he had previously received. This was Lincoln's most profitable visit to Bloomington.

### APRIL 1858

Much has been said about Abraham Lincoln's ability as a lecturer. Attention is directed to an address entitled "Discoveries and Inventions" which he made in Central Hall, Bloomington on April 5, 1858. The local press complimented it highly but it is said some of Lincoln's friends felt otherwise about it. A year later however, he was asked to return to Bloomington and repeat it, but such a small crowd turned out it was cancelled.

### NOVEMBER 1860

The last visit Lincoln paid to Bloomington was a very brief one and the speech he made probably the shortest public address he ever made there. He was on his way to Chicago on November 21, 1860 to confer with the newly elected vice President Hannibal Hamlin. His introductory remarks reveal how closely associated he had become with the citizens of Bloomington. He said in part: "Fellow-citizens of Bloomington and McLean County: I am glad to meet you after a longer separation than has been common between you and me. I thank you for the good report you made of the election in Old McLean. . ."

### MAY 1865

The people of Bloomington did not forget their friend when he went to Washington. After his assassination was reported a great indignation or commemoration meeting was held in the public square with a great crowd of people in attendance. A photograph was made of the assembly which is one of the unique pictures associated with the nationwide ceremonies held immediately after the President's death. The remains of the martyr Lincoln being removed from Chicago to Springfield for burial was routed through Bloomington on the morning of May 4, 1865. At 5:00 A.M. 5,000 people assembled at the depot where the train stopped for a few minutes. An arch had been built over the tracks with the inscription "Go to thy Rest."