

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN'S \$200 SPEECH

There must have been some feeling of satisfaction on the part of Abraham Lincoln when he was offered \$200 to deliver an address in Brooklyn N. Y. on the the Plymouth lecture course during the winter season of 1859-1860. He could not have surmised, however, the embarrassment this money consideration was to cause the young men sponsoring the program and the personal criticism which was to fall upon him, because of the compensation.

James A. Briggs seems to have been the chief source of information about the financial aspects of Lincoln's visit to New York where he addressed an audience at Cooper Union on February 27, 1860. As early as October 1859 Briggs wrote two letters for a group of young men, Joseph H. Richards, J. M. Pettengill and S. W. Tubbs, who were serving on a program committee to provide speakers for the lectures. One of these letters was directed to Thomas Corwin of Ohio and the other to Abraham Lincoln. Briggs states: "I wrote the letters as requested and offered as compensation for each lecture as I was authorized, the sum of \$200."

Mr. Corwin stopped at Brooklyn on his way to Congress to deliver his lecture but Lincoln could not arrange the special trip to New York until February 27. This was so late in the lyceum season the church committee anticipated the attendance would not be large enough to allow them to meet their guarantee. Mr. Briggs urged that the lecture be presented at Cooper Union in New York where a wider hearing might be secured but the expense for such a meeting in New York would be at least \$350 including the fee for the speaker. The committee still felt they would be unable to make ends meet. Mr. Briggs then tried to get, "The Young Men's Republican Club" and "The Draper Republican Union Club" to sponsor the effort but both declined. Finally the young men of the Plymouth Church group consented to go through with the program at Cooper Union providing Mr. Briggs would "share one-fourth of the expenses, if the sale of the tickets (25 cents) for the lecture did not meet the outlay." This was agreed upon.

The auditorium at Cooper Union seated approximately 1800 people. Various estimates of the number present have been made but written statements by Mr Briggs and Mr. Lincoln allow us to approach the probable attendance. Lincoln wrote, "They took in more than twice \$200." which at 25 cents each would place the attendance above 1600. Although we do not have the exact expense incurred by the committee, Mr. Briggs states that his one-fourth share of the profits was \$4.25 which would make the receipts show a net surplus of \$17.00. If the expenses did not run under the estimate and it is not likely they did, the gross income would have been at least \$367.00 and probably more. This would imply a minimum attendance of 1400. A reasonable conclusion would be that there were about 1500 present in the auditorium for the Cooper Union speech.

Lincoln stated that he left New York to visit his son at Exeter Academy "neither asking for pay, nor having any offered me," but that three days later he received a check for \$200 directed to him in New Hampshire. It was signed by S. W. Tubbs who was apparently treasurer of the committee. On his way back home he again stopped in New York over Sunday March 11. By this time the reports of Lincoln's successful speaking itinerary in New England, where he repeated much of the Cooper Union speech, were topics of conversation along with the highly complimentary reaction to his New York appearance. Apparently it was this second visit to New York which stirred up the Seward supporters of the Central Republican Campaign Club. By April 17 the club was ready to chastise the young men responsible for bringing Lincoln to New York and made the charging of admission for a political address, the point of issue. The proceedings of the meeting were reported in the local press with these published observations by a correspondent in attendance.

Mr. F. J. Young opened the fireworks with the statement that "He thought it disgraceful to the republican party that a price should be charged to hear a republican speech." Mr. C. S. Spencer the next speaker said "He had the honor of striking the first blow in this matter." He continued, "For one, he was filled with astonishment when he learned that a distinguished republican—yes, gentlemen, a man whose name had been presented by one of the states of the Union as a candidate for the Presidency—charged and received two hundred dollars for a speech at Cooper Institute."

This accusation brought Mr. James Briggs to his feet and he spoke with some authority about the preliminaries which had brought Mr. Lincoln to New York. He said: "It was true that Mr. Spencer had struck the first blow, and in his opinion the gentleman had been very unfortunate, if not in the blow, at least in the person at whom he had aimed it. Let him hit the right man and he might strike as many blows as he had a mind to. The gentleman had struck unjustly when he had hit Mr. Lincoln, and the gentlemen must know as well as himself that Mr. Lincoln was in no manner responsible for what occurred, and that he did not come here at all under the auspices of the Young Men's Republican Union; but he was invited to deliver a lecture in the Plymouth course, in Beecher's Church, at Brooklyn, and to select his own subject. It was known afterwards, however, that he would speak on a political subject, and the managers of the affair concluded instead of having it in Mr. Beecher's Church to have it in Cooper Institute, where more people could hear it. So far as charging for republican addresses was concerned, he did not approve of it; but he would not sit still and hear Mr. Lincoln arraigned, because he was innocent of any improper conduct."

Mr. Spencer came back with this comment stating that "he had no doubt Mr. Lincoln was sorry that he ever received the \$200 and that he would have been much better pleased had only his expenses been paid." Mr. Young then submitted a resolution proposing that "republican meetings should be held with open doors." Mr. Spencer did not think the resolution sufficient and presented a counter resolution "condemning the course of the Young Men's Republican Club." Mr. Dittenhoefer was opposed to this last resolution because "it would be regarded as an attack upon an efficient and honorable organization laboring for the same cause." Mr. Skidmore offered an amendment "that the Club would support no man for the presidency who receives money for making a public speech."

A Mr. Buckley then arose to defend the young men responsible for Mr. Lincoln's appearance and "knew it contained many noble young men." The climax of the charges however, came from a Mr. Macomber who said in referring to the young men's group. "For his part—he did not believe in being governed by the wishes of such political shysters." Again Mr. Buckley arose to defend the accused and said, "he was pained to hear such a term as shysters applied to gentlemen whom he knew to be earnest and effectual workers for the cause." Justice Welsh expressed his opinion that the criticism was "an attack on the Young Men's Republican Union meditated, dictated, he believed, by personal motives." Mr. Spencer replied that "he did not believe there was any precedent for a political speaker charging more than his expenses."

Lincoln wrote to C. F. McNeil on April 6, 1860, stating that in the first letter he received from New York he was offered \$200 for an address to be delivered in Beecher's Church, that he advised the committee it would have to be a political speech but he did not know until he reached New York that the meeting place had been changed to Cooper Union. He concludes his letter with the explanation, "My understanding now is—though I knew nothing of it at the time—that they did charge for admittance."