



# Lincoln Lore

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Bulletin of the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum. Mark E. Neely, Jr., Editor.  
Mary Jane Hubler, Editorial Assistant. Published each month by the  
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## THE WHIG FAITHFUL IN SPRINGFIELD

When Abraham Lincoln left New Salem for Springfield in 1837, he left one Whig town for another. The Whigs of central Illinois would be Lincoln's major preoccupation for over two decades. As late as 1858, he was fighting Stephen A. Douglas for the votes of the "Old Whigs," then thought to constitute the essential swing vote in Illinois's senatorial contest. Illinois no longer had oral voting after 1848, and studying the Whigs in the 1850s is a matter of inference, correlation, and guesswork. The poll books of the 1840s, however, allow historians to find out who Illinois's Whigs really were.

Since the poll books list voters by name and note their votes, it is possible to draw up a list of the Whigs in Springfield. By searching for their names in the census records of Sangamon County, one can discover the age, place of birth, occupation, value of real estate, and (to some extent) location of these Whigs. It is a decidedly laborious undertaking and not without its own elements of imprecision. The census occurred only at ten-year intervals. Elections occurred throughout the decades, and it is no mean feat to find voters in a census taken two or three or more years before or after the election. Chirography adds maddening obstacles to the path of the student of voting. The clerks who recorded the voters' names sometimes wrote legibly and sometimes did not. From election to election, they identified the same voter differently. The "Caleb Burchell" of 1848 is pretty clearly the "C. Burchell" of 1846 and the "Caleb Burchatt" of the 1850 census, but what does one make of the many John Smiths? Is "Jo Smith" also "J.M. Smith"? The census taker adds still another batch of penmanship, inconsistency, and idiosyncrasy in recording names and initials. All forms of voting analysis have their pitfalls, and the poll books at least offer a way to know how the individuals in Lincoln's Springfield voted. It seems well worth the effort.

An analysis of the congressional elections in Springfield in 1843, 1846, and 1848 provides us our first really intimate

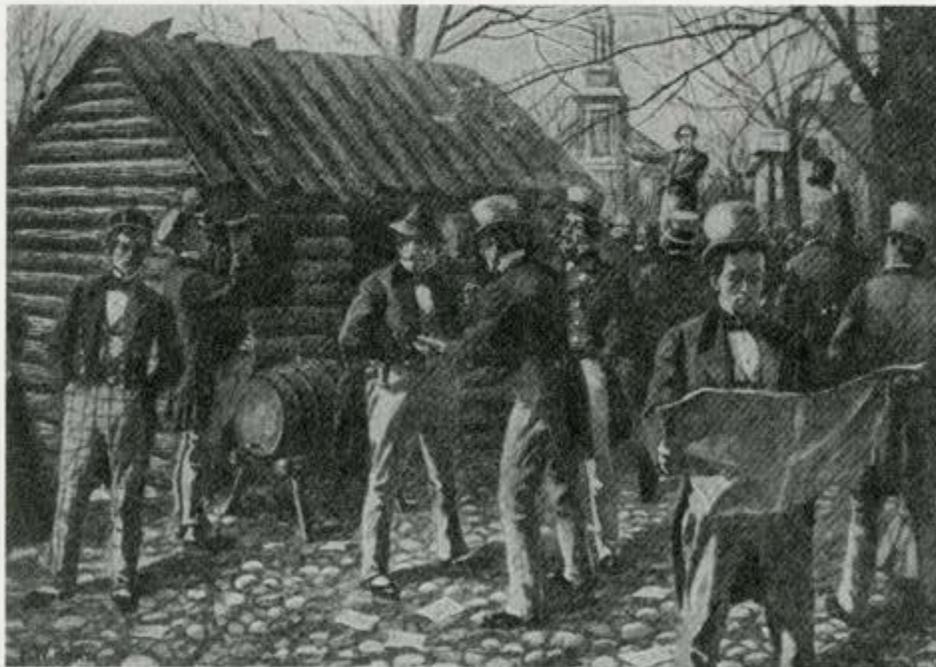
glimpse of the voting behavior which most affected Lincoln's life. This *Lincoln Lore* will focus on what might be called persistent Whig voters in Lincoln's Springfield. By comparing the lists of Whig voters in the three elections with each other, I have found those voters who voted for the Whig candidate for Congress at least twice in those three elections and who never voted any other way. Nineteenth-century voters were notoriously regular and rarely switched parties, so this latter qualification excludes only a few voters who switched parties or who scratched both parties' congressional candidates while voting for minor offices.

Interestingly enough, this qualification does exclude Abraham Lincoln from the list. He was so miffed in 1843 at John Hardin's nomination for Congress that he voted for minor offices but did not state a preference for Hardin or his Democratic opponent,

James A. McDougall. In 1848 Lincoln was in Washington, serving his own congressional term, and he failed to vote in the election which made Democrat Thomas L. Harris Lincoln's successor in the House of Representatives. Therefore, Lincoln did not vote twice in these three elections for the Whig candidate for Congress, and he fails to be a persistent Whig voter by the technical standards of this study.

Lincoln's case also provides an example of the problems involved in using the census. In the 1850

census, the one used for this study, Lincoln is listed as a forty-year-old attorney-at-law, born in Kentucky. The census taker made no estimate of the value of his real estate. Because Lincoln eventually became a famous man, we know a great deal about him—including the fact that by 1850 he owned his home and the lot it sat on as well as other property. Without this special knowledge, however, one would have to list Lincoln as a voter with no real estate. The census is inaccurate in this case and likely so in others. It is, however, the best evidence at hand for the myriads of more obscure Whigs in Springfield.



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FIGURE 1. An illustrator's depiction of a Whig rally in 1840 (from James Baldwin's *Abraham Lincoln: A True Life*).

The three elections used for this study showed the following results in Sangamon County:

	Total	John J. Hardin (W)	James A. McDougall (D)	Other
1843	2898	1694	1190	14
		Abraham Lincoln (W)	Peter Cartwright (D)	Other
1846	2394	1535	845	14
		Stephen T. Logan (W)	Thomas L. Harris (D)	
1848	3035	1649	1386	

For comparison, the results of the Presidential elections in Sangamon County in the same period were:

	Total	William H. Harrison (W)	Martin Van Buren (D)	
1840	3249	2000	1249	
		Henry Clay (W)	James K. Polk (D)	
1844	3208	1837	1371	
		Zachary Taylor (W)	Lewis Cass (D)	Other
1848	3326	1943	1336	47

Springfield's totals for the three congressional contests were:

	Total	John J. Hardin (W)	James A. McDougall (D)	Other
1843	1208	727	473	8
		Abraham Lincoln (W)	Peter Cartwright (D)	Other
1846	1383	919	450	14
		Stephen T. Logan (W)	Thomas L. Harris (D)	
1848	1553	888	665	

One page of the 1843 poll books is missing, leaving the names and votes of 29 voters in that election a mystery.

Of the Springfield citizens who voted for the Whig candidate for Congress in 1843, 1846, and 1848, 352 were persistent Whig voters. Of those 352, 103 were not listed in the 1850 census or in John C. Powers's *History of the Early Settlers of Sangamon County, Illinois*. Some information was available on 249 of the persistent Whig voters in Springfield's congressional elections, but age, place of birth, occupation, and value of real estate were not available for all of these (because of omissions in the census or lack of information in Powers's book). In order to describe these voters, one needs to define a group of Springfield citizens for comparison. A similar group of persistent Democratic voters was established. Of the Springfield citizens who voted for the Democratic candidate for Congress in 1843, 1846, and 1848, 160 were persistent Democratic voters, that is, voted twice or more for the Democratic candidate for Congress and did not vote for the Whig candidate in any of the three elections. Among the persistent Democrats, 101 could be located in the 1850 census or in Powers's work. Full information was not available on all of these, either.

What, then, were the Whigs like? Of the 245 Whigs and 92 Democrats in the study for whom information on place of birth was available, the voters were distributed thus:

Place of Birth	Whigs	Democrats
Alabama	1	0
Canada	2	1
Connecticut	6	2
Delaware	2	1
England	4	1
Illinois	14	2
Indiana	3	2
Ireland	3	12
Kentucky	53	15
Maine	0	2
Maryland	8	3
Massachusetts	16	0
Missouri	2	0
New Hampshire	1	1
New Jersey	17	4
New York	21	10
North Carolina	8	4
Ohio	11	4
Pennsylvania	20	11
Scotland	3	1
South Carolina	3	2
Tennessee	6	4
Virginia	35	10
Vermont	6	0

Persistent Whig voters in Springfield, by contrast with persistent Democratic voters, were (1) more likely to have come from Kentucky or Virginia, (2) much less likely to be Irish, (3) slightly less likely to hail from slave states other than Vir-

ginia or Kentucky, and (4) more likely to hail from New England. All of these conclusions are consistent with other studies of the differences between Whigs and Democrats except number 1. This is intriguing, especially in light of the importance of Kentuckians in the early settlement and formation of Illinois. A substantial number of those who gave Virginia as their birthplace had probably spent some time in Kentucky before settling in Illinois. The pattern of migration from Virginia to Kentucky to Illinois was common, and an institutional effect of it was the custom of oral voting itself. Oral voting persisted in Virginia until 1867 and in Kentucky until 1891. Somehow, those Kentuckians who migrated to central Illinois were more likely to become Whigs than Democrats. This suggests that the importance of Lincoln's roots cannot be overestimated. Born in Kentucky, Lincoln courted women born in Kentucky, joined law partnerships with three Kentuckians, married a Kentuckian, had a Kentuckian as his best friend, and voted as other Kentuckians in central Illinois tended to vote.

Breaking the voters down by occupation tends to show more similarities than differences between Whigs and Democrats. The reason for this is probably the factor of persistence in voting. Those who voted more steadily than their peers were obviously a steadier lot in what we might call their "lifestyle" today. The occupations listed in the census ranged from book binders to speculators, carriage trimmers to confectioners, and clock peddlars to mayors. Using the categories suggested by Merle Curti in *The Making of an American Community: A Case Study of Democracy in a Frontier County*, as modified by Don Harrison Doyle in *The Social Order of a Frontier Community: Jacksonville, Illinois, 1825-70*, one finds an occupation distribution for persistent voters as follows:

	Whig	Democratic
Business-Professional	46	18
Skilled Workers	64	29
Unskilled Workers	7	17
None	3	2

This distribution excludes the farmers, who constituted by far the largest single occupation even among Springfield's voters



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FIGURE 2. Lincoln's first stump speech, as shown in Elbridge S. Brooks's *The True Story of Abraham Lincoln, the American: Told for Boys and Girls*.



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**FIGURE 3. The American electorate was overwhelmingly rural in the 1840s.**

(the precincts were apparently large and included much of the rural area around Springfield). Thus of the 243 persistent Whig voters whose occupations could be established from the 1850 census, 123 were farmers. The result for the Democrats was similar, if not quite so striking: among 97 persistent voters with identifiable occupations, 31 were farmers.

The fact that most nonfarm persistent voters were businessmen, professionals, or skilled workers—whether they were Democrats or Whigs—is not surprising. The more successful people were more likely to remain longer in town to vote and to be recorded by the census taker. The fact that unskilled workers made up a larger proportion of the Democratic voters than the Whigs is congruent with the findings of those studies which say the Democrats appealed more to the lower orders in society than the Whigs. More surprising is the ability of the development-minded Whigs to appeal to farmers. Of course, in a society made up overwhelmingly of farmers—as the United States was in the 1840s—no political party could long exist without winning farmers' votes. Still, given the Democrats' essentially agrarian appeal, one must find the Whigs' ability to attract farmers a persuasive index of the Whigs' ability to attract all kinds of people to their program of economic development.

Steady voters were a relatively prosperous lot. Remaining in the same place for a substantial period of time brought economic success in the burgeoning American West, and economic success made the Westerner more likely to stay put. The average value of real estate reported for farmers who were persistent Whig voters was \$2134. For Democratic farmers who were persistent voters, it was \$1862. Excluding those farmers with no reported real estate value—probably farm laborers or tenants, one finds the Whigs with an average of \$2698 and the Democrats with an average of \$2510. One of the Whig farmers, James M. Bradford, was a man of conspicuous wealth in real estate: \$15,000 reported in the census. Excluding him, the Whig average was \$2016, still more than the Democratic average of \$1862.

Statisticians usually find it more revealing to classify wealth by categories. Doyle used a scheme which divided Jacksonville's citizens into those with \$0 property value, \$1 to \$999 value, \$1000 to \$4999 value, and \$5000 and up. Adapting this scheme to Springfield's persistent voters who were farmers, one derives the following distribution of wealth in real estate:

	Whig	Democratic
\$5000 or more	12	3
\$1000 to \$4999	58	16
\$1 to \$999	11	4
\$0	29	8

The distribution of real estate was strikingly similar for Whig and Democratic farmers. 52.7% of the Whigs and 51.6% of the Democrats reported real estate value from \$1000 to \$4999. 26.3% of the Whigs and 25.8% of the Democrats listed as farmers had no real estate reported in the census. Even the wealthiest farmers, listed with more than \$5000 in real estate,

were about equally represented among the Whigs (10.9%) and the Democrats (9.7%).

These findings are preliminary ones. Much more can and will be done with the information derived from Illinois's poll books. The conditions for inclusion in this study did much, one suspects, to draw the Whig and Democratic voters closer together, statistically. Conclusions must be tentative at best. There are, however, interesting clues for further studies of a similar nature. If one is looking for the roots of Whiggery in central Illinois, Kentucky and Virginia are obvious places to begin. Any tendency to think of Whigs as the commercial classes must certainly contend with the fact of their obvious ability to appeal to farmers in the environs of Springfield. These are modest

statements, nothing more than clues, perhaps. But the careful historical detective will ignore them only at the peril of pursuing false leads that will take him to blind alleys. It is always better to play the percentages.

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**FIGURE 4. Detail of an Illinois poll book for the 1843 election. The voters' names are at the left; candidates' names are at the top.**

## CUMULATIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY 1980-1981

by Mary Jane Hubler

Selections approved by a Bibliography Committee consisting of the following members: Dr. Kenneth A. Bernard, 50 Chatham Road, Harwich Center, Mass.; Arnold Gates, 168 Weyford Terrace, Garden City, N.Y.; Carl Haverlin, 8619 Louise Avenue, Northridge, California; James T. Hickey, Illinois State Historical Library, Old State Capitol, Springfield, Illinois; Ralph G. Newman, 175 E. Delaware Place, 5112, Chicago, Illinois; Lloyd Ostendorf, 225 Lookout Drive, Dayton, Ohio; Hon. Fred Schwengel, 200 Maryland Avenue, N.E., Washington, D.C.; Dr. Wayne C. Temple, 1121 S. 4th Street Court, Springfield, Illinois. New items available for consideration may be sent to the above persons, or the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum.

### 1980

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Pamphlet, paper, 8 15/16" x 5 15/16", 64 (4) pp., illus. Yearly membership dues include a subscription to this publication. Request for information should be directed to the Secretary, Abraham Lincoln Association, Old State Capitol, Springfield, Illinois 62706.

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Book, cloth, 8 1/2" x 5 5/8", fr., x p., 204 (10) pp., price, \$10.95.

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Pamphlet, flexible boards, 10 1/8" x 7 1/8", 497-560 pp., illus., price per single issue, \$5.00.

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Book, paper, 9 1/8" x 6", fr., 127 (1) pp., illus. Autographed copy by author.

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Miniature brochure, deep blue full leather, 2 7/8" x 2 1/8", fr., fd., (48) pp., harmonizing marbled decorative endpapers, housed in matching marbled paper covered slipcase, spine and front cover design stamped in 23K gold, illus., price, \$37.00. No. 117 of a limited edition of 249 copies. Hand numbered and autographed copy by author.

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Same as above.

This deluxe edition is housed in a matching full leather slipcase and has a tipped in personalized miniature stamped in gold bookplate, price, \$75.00. No. XXXVIII [38] of a limited edition of 50 copies. Hand numbered and autographed copy by author.

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