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LINCOLN IN CHAMPAIGN COUNTY.

By DANIEL KILHAM DODGE.

a young man enjoyed the friendship of Lincoln. He was for several years in the fifties editor of the *Urbana Union* and he was for a short time also associated with the *Central Illinois Gazette*.

At the risk of straying beyond the bounds of my subject I will take this opportunity to correct a false impression that many people have as to Lincoln's ability and standing as a lawyer. His biographers have been inclined to pay too slight attention to this side of their subject and some of them have probably taken too seriously Lincoln's humorous description of himself as a "mast-fed lawyer". This statement should be taken with a grain of salt, like his other humorous remark that he had very little influence with this administration. While Lincoln was not learned in the law, like Seward or Stanton, he was regarded by his colleagues as one of the best *nisi prius* lawyers, whatever that is, in the state, and as cross examiner and jury pleader he had few equals and no superiors. His practice, furthermore, was not confined to the eighth circuit, but he frequently appeared in the Chicago courts and before the state supreme court and at least twice before the Supreme Court at Washington. His association with Edwin M. Stanton, in the McCormick Reaper Case at Cincinnati, tho it ended unfortunately for Lincoln, is sufficient evidence that his reputation as a lawyer extended beyond the limits of his own state. According to Whitney, Lincoln's last case, which was not ended until after his inauguration, was in the Urbana court, Whitney appearing, as Lincoln could not very well leave his job in Washington.

It is probably not generally known that occasionally Lincoln was asked by Judge Davis to take his place on the bench, a wholly irregular proceeding, and according to Whitney "he once held an entire term of the Champaign Circuit Court." Whitney also states that two cases were reversed by the Supreme Court on that account. On at least one occasion he also acted as prosecutor. Thus, however informally in the one case, Lincoln served in all three branches of government, legislative, executive and judicial.

Lincoln's political connection with Champaign county seems to be limited to three important periods, separated from one another by two years, 1854 when the Missouri Compromise was repealed and as a consequence he reentered politics, 1856, when he delivered at least a hundred speeches in support of Fremont, the first Republican candidate, and 1858, at the time of the great debates with Douglas. It was while he was attending court in Urbana, too, that Lincoln heard that he had received 105 votes for the vice presidential nomination at the first Republican convention, held in Philadelphia, in 1856.

On the evening of October 24th Lincoln delivered an address at the court house in Urbana before

an audience that filled the court room. Although the building in which Lincoln spoke was torn down five years later, the spot on which he stood is marked by a tablet, presented by Judge Cunningham. Whitney, in "Life on the Circuit with Lincoln", publishes what he claims to be a full report of this speech, covering thirty-five pages, but as he does not state his source it is fair to assume that the report is at the best merely paraphrase, with no more claim to exactness than his report of the "Lost Speech". Especially in the peroration, the Urbana speech follows closely the Peoria Speech, of the week before, to which, according to Whitney, Lincoln referred just before going to the Court House from the Pennsylvania House, where he and Judge Davis were staying. "Yes, the Judge and I locked horns there." The resemblance to the earlier speech is not strange, for, like most great men, Lincoln was not afraid to repeat himself. Whitney is certainly wrong in the following statement: "Nor could I fail to observe the complete ease and absence of any strain or labored effort displayed; he had no time or opportunity to make any preparation." Lincoln was not like Douglas and Seward, a ready speaker, and his few real impromptu efforts are far from successful. The fact that he was able to appear gay and carefree just before delivering the speech is evidence not of absence of preparation but of perfect confidence that he was fully primed. It was the readiness of the actor after the last dress rehearsal.

During the campaign of 1856 Lincoln spoke at least once in this county, but there is no record of the event beyond the general statement by Whitney, and Judge Cunningham. On at least one occasion Lincoln spoke in a church in Champaign and it is possible that this was the scene of the 1856 speech.

In the *Gazette* for August 4th, 1858, occurs the following article: "Mr. Lincoln has accepted the proposition of Mr. Douglas to debate with him at the following points.....We have only to express our regrets that West Urbana could not have been made one of the points, so that our citizens could have had the pleasure of listening to the great oratorical tournament between "Long Abe" and the "Little Giant." There will be some rare speaking done, or we are much mistaken."

But altho West Urbana was not included in the regular debates, a substitute was furnished when Lincoln accepted the invitation of the Young Men's Republican Club, to speak at the Fair Grounds on September 24th, the day after the County Fair, Douglas having been engaged to speak the day before. Lincoln's letter of acceptance, addressed to Judge Cunningham, secretary of the club, was presented to the University by Judge Cunningham and forms one of the chief treasures of the library.

As it has never before been reprinted the fol-

lowing announcement of the meeting addressed by Mr. Lincoln may be of interest:

"Republican Rally on the 24th

Mr. Lincoln is to be received by his friends at the platform in front of the Doane House on the 23rd and conveyed in a private carriage to the fair grounds, at which place Mr. Douglas is to speak. On the evening of the 23rd Mr. Lincoln is to be the guest of the West Urbana Republican Club at the Doane House. On the 24th the club and citizens in mass are to meet in the Park or Public Square at 10 A. M. to form in procession and escort Mr. Lincoln to the fair grounds.

Thirty-two couples on horseback, ladies and gentlemen, are to form in procession and proceed to march to Urbana with music and banners, and will be joined by the citizens of Urbana and vicinity, from thence to the fair grounds—here a basket picnic dinner will be the order, after which, at 2 o'clock P. M. speaking will commence.

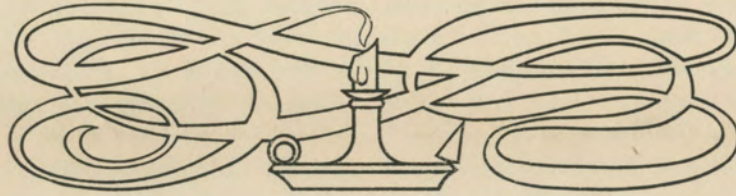
Mr. Lincoln will reply to the speech of Mr. Douglas of the 23rd. Come Republicans, Come Democrats, Come everybody, and hear the two leaders and champions of the two parties, and judge for yourselves. Let us have a good friendly time. On the

evening of the 24th, Mr. Lincoln will be the guest of the Urbana Club. Trumbull, Thompson and Lane of Indiana have been invited."—*Central Illinois Gazette*.

No report of the speech was made. The *Gazette* for September 29th contained the following brief account of the meeting:

"On Friday, succeeding the last day of the fair, a large and enthusiastic crowd assembled around the grand stand to listen to Mr. Lincoln, the procession, that part of it composed of lady equestriennes in particular, was one of the finest things we have ever seen, and was over two miles in length. The friends of the speaker expressed themselves as pre-eminently well satisfied with the demonstration and with his effort."

It was at the dinner before the meeting that Mr. Lincoln showed his simplicity and kindness of heart by giving his seat at the head of the table to "Granny", as he addressed her, whom he knew as a waitress at the hotel. The guest of honor made himself comfortable at the foot of an adjoining tree. This incident was told to me a number of years ago by Judge Cunningham, who was a marshall in the procession as well as secretary of the club.



*"Let us have faith that right
makes might" - Cooper Union
Address - Daniel Wilham Dodge.*