

Lincoln and Iowa

BY ORA WILLIAMS*

Abraham Lincoln knew Iowa people and appreciated the quality of Iowa soil.

He saw Iowa from the eastern rim and the western, but never traveled into the interior or across the state.

He bought and sold town lots in Iowa. He owned two Iowa farms he never saw.

He made two political speeches in Iowa. He was invited and urged to do more campaigning.

He practiced law in a district adjoining Iowa and met lawyers from this state. He took part in one lawsuit, a really big one, of vast importance to all Iowa.

He was deeply interested in western development by railroads and designated that the road to the Pacific should have terminus in Iowa.

As president he appointed able Iowa men to responsible offices. He named an Iowa man as member of his cabinet. An Iowa man wrote the platform on which he was elected. His son married an Iowa girl. He had warm affection for Iowa through his memory of his first sweetheart whose family became Iowa residents. He was much gratified over the whole-hearted response of the young state of Iowa to his call for support in saving the Union in its hour of greatest peril.

His appointment of an Iowa man to the supreme court gave that body one of its most eminent members. He named an Iowa man to be governor of Nebraska territory much to his credit. He gave authority to an Iowa man, high in his administration, to take a leading part in the first international postal convention.

Lincoln's keen eyes most certainly caught sight of Iowa as early as 1856 or 1857. He had attained eminence as a lawyer. His standing was such that he was em-

*This manuscript was written by Mr. Williams prior to his resignation as Curator of the Iowa State Department of History and Archives in 1946 and since held in the ANNALS files.

ployed by the Rock Island railroad company to assist in the defense of an action brought to prevent, if possible, the building of any bridges from Illinois into Iowa across the Mississippi river. A St. Louis steamboat had broken a bridge at Davenport. Through Lincoln's logic, it was determined that bridge building could not be prevented just because some steamboat men were unable to go safely between bridge piers. Lincoln had made personal inspection of the scene of the accident that occasioned the lawsuit.

Lincoln's first public appearance in Iowa was at Burlington. It was a side event in the famous debates he had with Senator Douglas in the campaign of 1858. In an interval of two or three days between debate dates, Lincoln came to Burlington, and on October 9, 1858, he spoke to Iowa Republicans. There was a campaign on in Iowa as well as in Illinois, though not for governor.

Lincoln's next appearance in Iowa was as a railroad attorney. He attended court at Galena in the spring of 1859, and having some business at Dubuque, he went there in his special car as attorney for the Illinois Central. He made no speech at that time. It was purely a business visit.

The next visit of Lincoln to Iowa was entirely accidental and informal, but he did make a political speech. In the summer of 1859 he went into Kansas to speak on the political issues of the day. When he returned as far as St. Joseph, Missouri, much wearied by his travels, he was induced by a steamboat captain to accompany him up-river for a rest. They reached Council Bluffs where he met friends. The steamboat became grounded on a sandbar, and the friends profited by this accident to arrange a public meeting to be addressed by the man who on the previous year had so well acquitted himself in debate. Lincoln made a speech which was well received by his friends and received the usual scoffing from his opponents.

But the report of his persuasiveness spread to the

interior, and John A. Kasson, then at the head of the new Republican party in Iowa, formally invited Lincoln to speak at the state fair at Oskaloosa. Unfortunately the date could not be met.

It was at Council Bluffs that Lincoln's friends took him up a high hill overlooking the Missouri valley and showed him where the road to the Pacific ought to start. He remembered it and later while he was president, he designated Council Bluffs as the terminal for the Union Pacific. Lincoln returned home by way of St. Joseph.

Lincoln did not visit Iowa again, but neither did he forget. It was related that on the occasion of the Council Bluffs visit, he showed the paper issued to him as pay for being captain in the Black Hawk war, entitling him to get land, and he expressed a wish to acquire land in Iowa. Before the end of that year he had applied for a deed to land and secured the "land patent" therefor. That Iowa farm was 120 acres in Crawford county. It remained the property of the family until finally disposed of by his son as administrator of Mrs. Lincoln's estate.

This was not the only land that Lincoln had owned in Iowa. Two issues of "military scrap" were given Lincoln, both for service in the Black Hawk war. On the first he secured 40 acres of land in Tama county, which he held for a long time.

It is also related that Lincoln at one time owned some town lots in Council Bluffs. He is said to have purchased them direct from Mr. Judd, his leading Illinois friend. He probably did not hold them long.

A quite plausible explanation has been made for what might be called Lincoln's evident sentimental interest in Iowa soil. As everyone knows, his first love was for Ann Rutledge, and his failure to secure her for a helpmeet sorely grieved him through life. Now, Miss Rutledge's parents came to Iowa and a brother received an appointment from Lincoln.

Not alone by reason of his well acquired fame as a

political debater, but by many contacts, Lincoln had influential friends in Iowa and a host of sincere admirers, so that he stood well when the great convention met to nominate one who would become the Civil War president. Lincoln had support in the Iowa delegation, but it was not unanimous, for the reason that delegates chosen here had come from other states and knew other candidates. But, a member of the Iowa delegation (Kasson), was on the resolutions committee at Chicago in 1860 and put the finishing touches to the platform on which Lincoln was elected. Lincoln as president drafted Kasson to be first assistant postmaster general and from that post he went to Europe to open the way for international postal relations.

Another member of the Iowa delegation to the Chicago convention that nominated Lincoln was Alvin Saunders. President Lincoln sent him to Nebraska to be governor of the territory, in which position he acquitted himself well.

At the time of his visit to Council Bluffs, he met another who would be his life-long supporter—Gen. Grenville M. Dodge. He made good use of Dodge in the Civil war.

Lincoln did not have an Iowa man in his cabinet, but he did name one to be a member, and the transaction was not quite completed when Booth fired the fatal shot. Lincoln's successor, Mr. Johnson, did take Senator Harlan into the cabinet as Lincoln had intended.

Lincoln knew the Harlan family well. Mrs. Harlan had been of great value in the war work and stood in high esteem, along with Aunt Becky Young and Ann Wittenmeyer. Besides, Lincoln's son, Robert T., married a daughter of Harlan.

No appointment made by President Lincoln redounded more to his credit than his placing Samuel F. Miller on the supreme court. Although Lincoln and Miller had practiced law in adjoining districts they had not met. In fact, when Miller's name was presented to

the president with assurance he would make a good judge, Lincoln did not know the man, but accepted the unanimous indorsement of the Iowa bar. In that manner, the highest court of the land secured one of its greatest constitutional judges.

Lincoln's friends in Iowa were among the very best and most loyal of citizens. Lincoln had no need to make a campaign in Iowa for himself. That he loved Iowa, there is no doubt. There is in Iowa a marker (Council Bluffs) where he stood and pointed out the place for the start to the Pacific on the rails. His Gettysburg address is an all-sufficient monument to him for all Iowa.

Hoegh Remains an Iowa Citizen

Since his appointment by President Eisenhower as National Civil Defense Administrator and need to be in Washington, Gov. Leo A. Hoegh has sold his residence in Chariton, Iowa, and moved his family to Westwood, Maryland, a suburb of the national capital. This gave rise to wonderment if he would return to Iowa at the end of his official Washington service. Quickly he set at rest any doubt saying, "We are not pulling up stakes in Iowa. Chariton will continue to be my official residence. This is a great town and Iowa is a great state, and why should anybody abandon either of them?"

Nearly all former governors of the state have remained citizens here following their service as executives. Only two outstanding exceptions have been noted. Gov. Leslie M. Shaw, went to Washington as Secretary of the Treasury under Pres. Theodore Roosevelt, and afterward moved to Philadelphia, where with others he organized and became the president of a financial institution. Also, Gov. Frank D. Jackson, after official retirement, spent long years as a citizen in Des Moines, but eventually late in life removed to California; where one of his sons resided, and there he died.

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.