

THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

No. 8

ISSUED IN AUGUST 1949

VOL. XXX

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Lincoln and Iowa

Speech delivered by William J. Petersen, Superintendent of the State Historical Society of Iowa, before a Joint Session of the 53rd General Assembly of the State of Iowa on February 11, 1949.

On February 12th all Iowans will unite to pay their respects to Abraham Lincoln, a man whom many consider the greatest American this nation has produced. It is fitting that the Fifty-third General Assembly should pause in its deliberations to honor Lincoln, for in doing so it is but following the precedent of the Thirty-third General Assembly which forty years ago passed a law making Lincoln's birthday a legal holiday in Iowa. This was back in 1909 when the nation was celebrating the one hundredth anniversary of Lincoln's birth. It is interesting to note that this act was the first bill adopted by the Thirty-third General Assembly, the first measure to reach Governor Beryl F. Carroll's desk, and the first to receive his signature.

It is indeed appropriate that the lawmakers of this state should observe Lincoln's birthday, for

Lincoln himself was both a lawmaker and a lawyer. Actually Lincoln was elected to the Illinois legislature at the age of twenty-five, three years before he was admitted to the bar. Only one member of this Fifty-third General Assembly is as young as Abe Lincoln was when he entered the Illinois legislature in 1834.

As a young man Lincoln was introduced by sheer accident to Blackstone's *Commentaries*. He soon developed a deep respect for the majesty of the law. Years later he declared: "Let reverence for the laws be breathed by every American mother to her lisping babe; let it be taught in schools and in colleges; let it be written in primers, spelling books and in almanacs; let it be preached from the pulpit, proclaimed in legislative halls, and enforced in courts of justice. Let it become the political religion of the nation; and let old and young, rich and poor, grave and gay sacrifice unceasingly on its altars."

Most Iowans are fairly familiar with the life of Lincoln. A few of them (and they are widely scattered throughout the state) have become ardent Lincoln students. Foremost among these is Judge James W. Bollinger of Davenport, who has willed his collection of 3,500 Lincoln books to the State University of Iowa. The Bollinger library (valued at more than \$50,000) is not only the finest collection of Lincolniana in Iowa, but is un-

questionably the best private Lincoln collection in the United States. Lincoln collectors in Iowa have done much to perpetuate the memory of our first martyred President.

This is as it should be for the life of Lincoln can be associated with many phases of Iowa history. Throughout the nation students of state and local history have been eager to link the immortal Lincoln with their own region. Kentucky prides herself as his birthplace. Indiana is equally proud that he spent fourteen years in the Hoosier State before reaching his majority. Illinois proudly claims him as a citizen whose thirty years at New Salem and Springfield groomed him for the presidency. Between 1861 and 1865 the spotlight was focused on Lincoln in the White House: directing the war as commander-in-chief, ably guiding his party through the maze of partisan politics bogging down the war effort, and conducting American diplomacy in a highly successful manner.

Although the Great Emancipator never lived in Iowa, he did own land in the Hawkeye State, and made decisions of far-reaching effect on its history. He was intimately acquainted with many Iowans, visited the state on several occasions, spoke at Burlington and Council Bluffs, appointed one Iowan to the President's cabinet, and another to the United States Supreme Court. Lincoln's only living son married the daughter of James

Harlan of Mount Pleasant. Finally, it should be pointed out that Iowa strongly supported Lincoln in both presidential elections; and that her military contributions to the Civil War were brave, generous, and wholehearted. When the hand of the assassin laid the Great Emancipator low just one week after Lee's surrender at Appomattox the people of Iowa deeply mourned his loss.

Before discussing more fully Lincoln's intimate associations with Iowa it may be well to point out that the history of the Hawkeye State contains certain interesting parallels with the life of the Great Emancipator. For example, he was born in Kentucky in 1809, one year after the first American fort in Iowa was erected on the site of modern Fort Madison. The Lincoln family moved to Indiana in 1816, the very year that Fort Armstrong and Fort Crawford were erected on the eastern bank of the Mississippi opposite present-day Davenport and McGregor. Lincoln reached his majority and removed to Illinois in 1830, the same year that a group of sturdy lead miners drew up the Miners' Compact at what is now Dubuque. During the Black Hawk War, Lincoln served as captain in the Fourth Illinois Volunteer Infantry and thus witnessed the dramatic events leading to the first permanent cession of Iowa land by the red man.

Lincoln was appointed postmaster at New Salem in May of 1833, a fortnight before permanent

white settlement began in the Black Hawk Purchase. While Lincoln was delivering mail out of his tall hat at New Salem, Postmaster Antoine Le Claire brought his letters to Davenport in his coat-tails.

Lincoln began his eight-year legislative career at Vandalia in 1834, the same year Iowa was attached to Michigan Territory. When the capital of Illinois was moved to Springfield in 1837, Lincoln chose that city as his home, serving as a legislator in the new building designed by John Francis Rague, who two years later designed the Old Stone Capitol at Iowa City. Rague, incidentally, knew Stephen A. Douglas and Mary Todd, and is said to have groomed Abe Lincoln for a dance.

So much for the chronology of Iowa history as it can be woven into the Lincoln story. Let us turn now to the more intimate associations he had with the story of Iowa, discussing him first as a landowner. In 1850 and again in 1855, Congress passed laws granting bounties of land to persons who had rendered services in the armies of the United States. Lincoln, having served in the Black Hawk War, was granted three land warrants. He selected two of these land warrants in Iowa, striking testimony of his high regard for the future prospects of the Hawkeye State. The first Iowa land allotted him was a forty-acre tract in Tama county, fourteen miles northwest of Toledo. It

was improved land worth \$10 per acre when Lincoln acquired it, and the taxes were only \$1.60 in 1858. The warrant was issued to him on April 16, 1852, and the patent granted on June 1, 1855. After Lincoln's death this property was sold by his heirs.

His second Iowa military land warrant was a 120-acre tract in Crawford county, eight miles northwest of Denison. This land was sold by his son, Robert Todd Lincoln, in 1892 for the sum of \$1,300. In 1923, the Denison chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution erected a boulder and copper plate upon this land as a reminder that it was once owned by Abraham Lincoln.

In addition to his two military land warrants, Lincoln acquired certain lots and small parcels of land in and near Council Bluffs from Norman B. Judd in 1859. These lots were held by Lincoln at the time of his death, and in 1867 the Lincoln heirs reconveyed them to Mr. Judd.

Next let us turn to Lincoln as an able railroad lawyer, whose services were much in demand by such corporations as the Illinois Central and the Rock Island railroads. One of his most famous railroad cases deals with the wreck of the steamboat *Effie Afton* on the Rock Island bridge in 1856. Although there is no evidence that Lincoln visited Iowa on the occasion of his defense of the

bridge company against the steamboat interests in 1857, the importance of his contribution to Iowa history, to railroad history, and, indeed, to the westward movement can scarcely be over-emphasized. The story briefly runs as follows:

On February 22, 1854, the iron horse of the Rock Island railroad reached the Mississippi opposite Davenport — the first railroad to link the Father of Waters with the Atlantic. Anxious to gain easy access to the fertile prairies of Iowa, a bridge was completed between Rock Island and Davenport in April, 1856, despite the strong opposition of Secretary of War Jefferson Davis who favored the southern route. On May 6th the steamboat *Effie Afton*, while attempting to go through the Illinois side of the drawbridge, smashed against the pier, caught on fire, and was completely destroyed. The flames also consumed the wooden span east of the drawbridge, putting the bridge out of commission fully four months. The steamboat owners promptly brought suit against the bridge company and the case was tried in the United States circuit court in Chicago in September, 1857. During the voluminous testimony bitter feelings were exhibited on both sides.

Lincoln himself remained calm throughout the heated trial. According to the original report in the *Chicago Daily Press* of September 24, 1857, Lincoln stated that he expected "to grow earnest

as he proceeded but not ill-natured. . . . The last thing that would be pleasing to him, he assured the jury, 'would be to have one of these great channels, extending almost from where it never freezes to where it never thaws, blocked up. But there is a travel from east to west,' he pointed out, 'whose demands are not less important than that of the river. It is growing larger and larger, building up new countries with a rapidity never before seen in the history of the world.' He alluded to the astonishing growth of Illinois, having grown within his memory to a population of a million and a half; to Iowa and the other young and rising communities of the Northwest."

"Railroad travel," Lincoln asserted, "had its rights, just as much as steamboat travel. If the Mississippi had not acquired its advantage in 'priority and legislation,'" Lincoln contended, "the railroad could enter into 'free competition' with it and readily surpass it." By way of illustration, Lincoln pointed to the 12,586 freight cars and 74,179 passengers that had passed over the Rock Island bridge in eleven months. "This shows," Lincoln concluded, "that this bridge must be treated with respect in this court and is not to be kicked about with contempt."

Lincoln made a second important contribution to the history of railroading in Iowa and America when, as President of the United States, he was

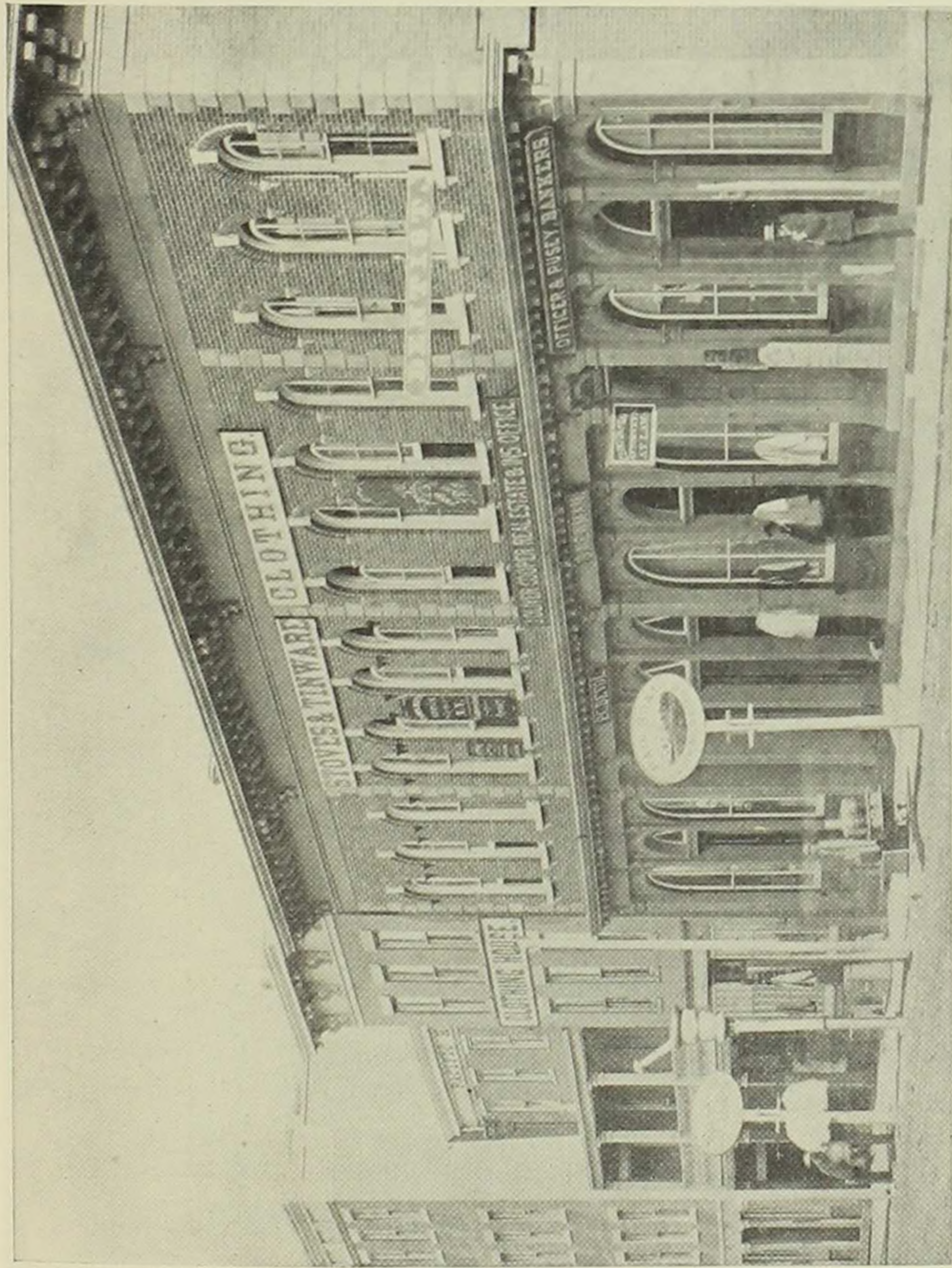


Photo Courtesy Council Bluffs Public Library

LINCOLN STOPPED AT PACIFIC HOUSE AT COUNCIL BLUFFS — 1859

(Small 3-story building on extreme left)

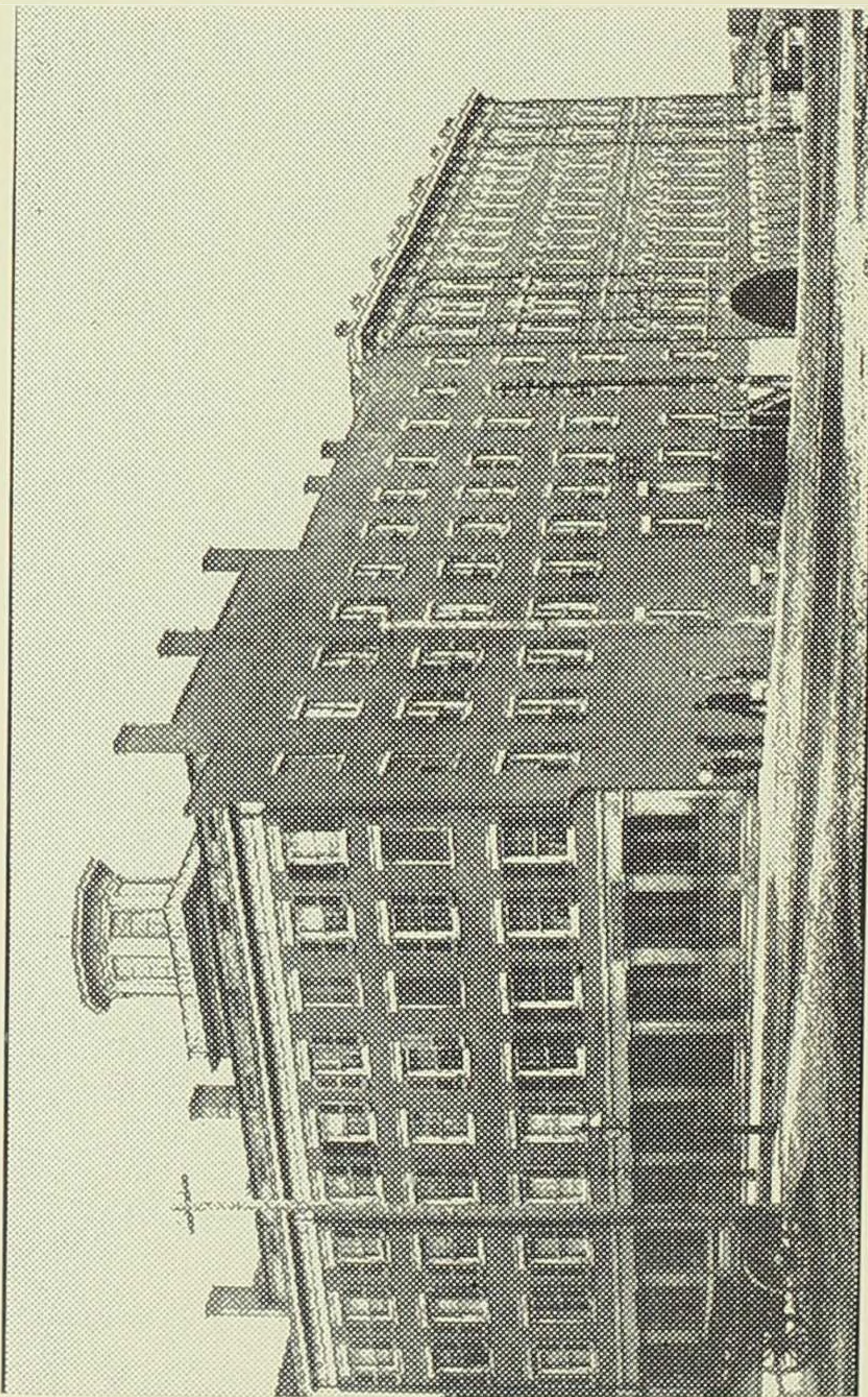


Photo Courtesy *Dubuque Telegraph-Herald*

LINCOLN STAYED AT JULIEN HOUSE AT DUBUQUE — 1859

confronted with the problems of locating the eastern terminus of the Union Pacific.

While stopping at Council Bluffs in 1859, he had met Grenville M. Dodge, who had just completed extensive railroad surveys west of the Missouri for the Rock Island railroad. Lincoln remembered this visit when Congress passed the act providing for a transcontinental railroad and promptly called General Dodge to the White House for a conference. These two conferences with Grenville M. Dodge, more perhaps than anything else, fixed Council Bluffs as the eastern terminus of the Union Pacific. A memorial to Lincoln has been erected on the bluff overlooking the Missouri river, where he and his Iowa friends stood in 1859 and looked westward across Nebraska.

Lincoln also visited Dubuque in the spring of 1859, after presenting a case for the Illinois Central Railroad Company at Galena. He arrived in Dubuque with a party of railroad officials in a private car and spent a day and a night at the Julien House.

The remainder of Lincoln's intimate associations with Iowa are concerned with his political and presidential years. He was elected a United States representative the same year Iowa achieved statehood, but served only one term. During the 1850's, he joined the Republican party in Illinois. This threw him into close contact with James W.

Grimes — the father of the Republican party in Iowa — who had been elected Whig Governor of the Hawkeye State in 1854. Both men campaigned for election to the United States Senate in 1858: Grimes winning the coveted office in Iowa while Lincoln lost it to Douglas in Illinois.

During the heat of the famous Lincoln-Douglas debates, Abraham Lincoln crossed the Mississippi to deliver an address in Burlington. Clark Dunham, editor of the Burlington *Hawk-Eye* and an ardent Lincoln admirer, made the following comment on Lincoln's oration of October 9th:

"Grimes' Hall was filled to its full capacity. . . . So great is the sympathy felt here in the spirited canvass in Illinois, and so high is the opinion entertained of the ability of Mr. Lincoln as a speaker that a very short notice brought together from twelve to fifteen hundred ladies and gentlemen.

"High, however, as was the public expectation, and much as was anticipated, he, in his address of two hours, fully came up to the standard that had been erected. It was a logical discourse, replete with sound arguments, clear, concise and vigorous, earnest, impassioned and eloquent. Those who heard recognized in him a man fully able to cope with the little giant anywhere, and altogether worthy to succeed him.

"We regret exceedingly that it is not in our

power to report his speech in full this morning. We know that we could have rendered no more acceptable service to our readers. But it is not in our power.

“Mr. Lincoln appeared Saturday evening fresh and vigorous, there was nothing in his voice, manner or appearance to show the arduous labors of

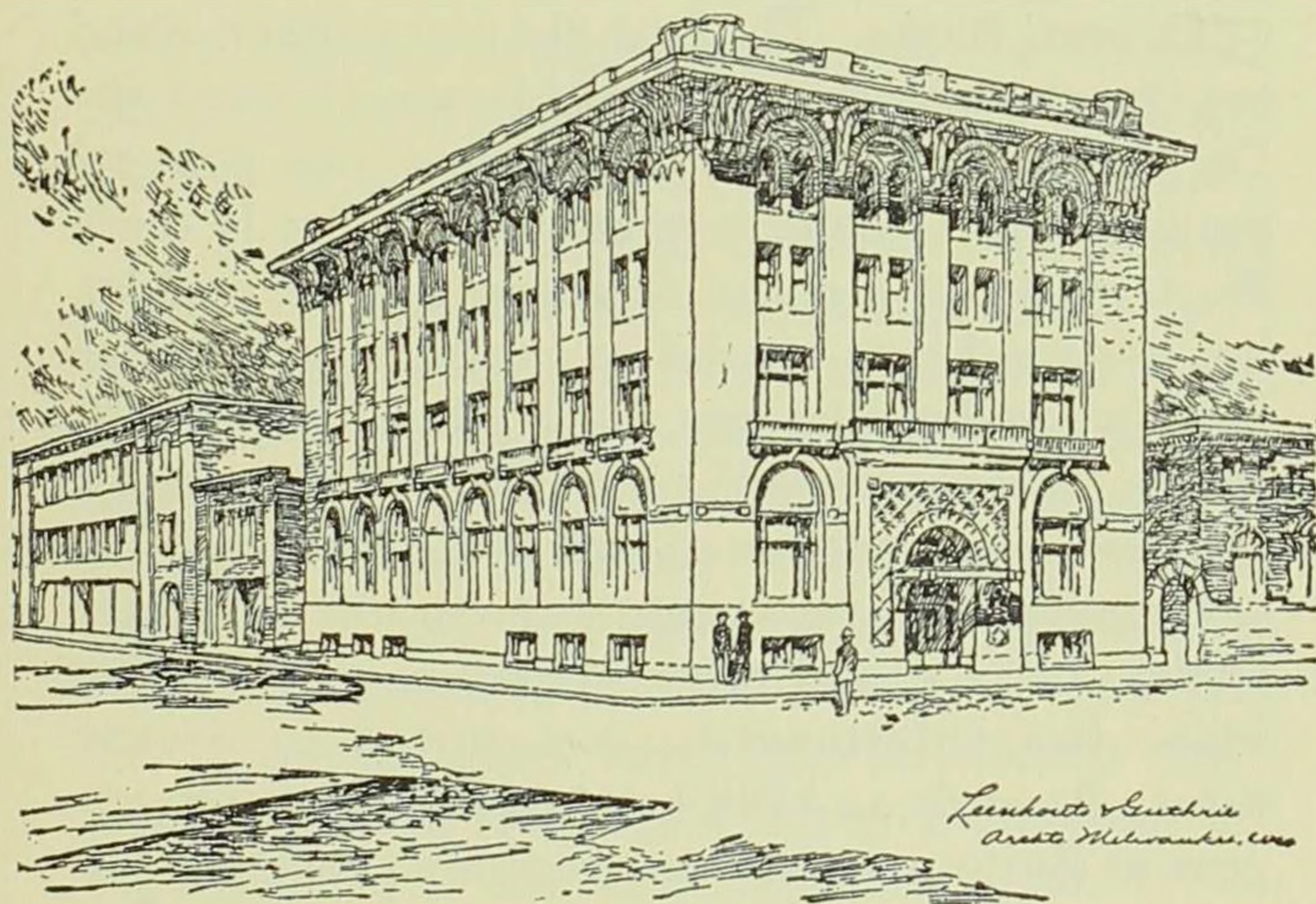


Photo Courtesy Burlington Public Library

GRIMES HALL — WHERE LINCOLN SPOKE IN 1858

the last two months — nothing to show that immense labors of the canvass had worn upon him in the least. In this respect he has altogether the advantage of Douglas, whose voice is cracked and

husky, temper soured and general appearance denoting exhaustion."

The only other speech that Lincoln is known to have made in Iowa was at Council Bluffs on the occasion of his flying trip out west in the summer of 1859. It attracted a good crowd, even though it was unscheduled, and it elicited conflicting reactions from the Republican and Democratic editors of Council Bluffs. The friendly *Nonpareil* praised his "masterly and unanswerable speech" and the "dexterity with which he applied the political scalpel to the Democratic carcass." The *Weekly Bugle* spoke in a derisive vein of Lincoln's effort, but admitted that his defeat by Senator Douglas had "magnified him into quite a lion" at Council Bluffs. Lincoln stayed at the Pacific House on this occasion and made his speech in Concert Hall.

Because of his reputation as an orator and party leader, Lincoln had other invitations to speak in Iowa, but unfortunately was forced to decline them. As early as 1844 he had been invited to appear at Burlington but was unable to come.

In the summer of 1856 Governor James W. Grimes desired him to be present at a Republican rally in Burlington, but Lincoln wrote he could not spare the time and, in any case, was "superstitious about calling in foreign help from neighboring states on the eve of an election." However, if the opposition had imported a "foreigner," Lincoln

stated he had "no objection to drive a nail in his track." An invitation to "strike hands with the Fremonters of Iowa" at Muscatine in September of 1856 was declined because of the hard work still remaining before the Republicans in Illinois.

In August of 1857 Lincoln wrote Governor Grimes that he was "altogether too poor" to make the trip to Iowa from Chicago, where he was busily engaged as defense attorney for the Rock Island Bridge Company. To Hawkins Taylor of Keokuk he wrote in 1859: "It is bad to be poor. . . . I shall go to the wall for bread and meat if I neglect my business this year as well as last. . . . It would please me to see the city and good people of Keokuk, but for this year it is little less than an impossibility. . . . I do hope you will have no serious troubles in Iowa. What thinks Grimes about it? I have not known him to be mistaken about an election in Iowa." Two days after Lincoln wrote the above letter John A. Kasson urged him to visit the Iowa state fair at Oskaloosa, but the busy Illinois lawyer had gone to Ohio.

In the harrowing Civil War days that followed, Iowa gave unwavering support to Abraham Lincoln. By 1860 the Hawkeye State was strongly Republican in politics, having elected Samuel J. Kirkwood Governor and having dispatched James Harlan to the United States Senate. The State was equally strong in supporting Lincoln in the

four-cornered presidential campaign of 1860 — Lincoln received 70,409 out of a total of 128,331 votes cast, or 54.8 per cent of the total. In the election of 1864, despite the war-weariness of a home front numbed by heavy losses, Iowans gave him even stronger support — 89,075 of the 138,671 votes cast were for Lincoln — or 64.2 per cent. Perhaps the most striking endorsement of Lincoln came from Iowa soldiers who cast 15,178 votes for “Honest Abe” compared with 1,364 votes for General George McClellan. Surely no commander-in-chief has ever received a warmer support from his fighting forces than did Abraham Lincoln in this eleven to one vote of confidence by Iowa soldiers during the campaign of 1864.

And it was not merely at the ballot box that Iowa supported Lincoln. Fully 78,059 men out of a population of 674,913 donned the Federal blue to “Preserve the Union.” They represented half of the able-bodied men in Iowa. It was a greater number of soldiers than Washington had commanded in his armies during the American Revolution. It represented a higher percentage of the total population than in World War I or World War II. The contribution is even more significant since mechanized agriculture was in its infancy.

If Iowans admired and supported Lincoln, the Great Emancipator was equally mindful of the fine citizens dwelling in the Hawkeye State. He

appointed James Harlan of Mount Pleasant as his Secretary of the Interior and subsequently Samuel Freeman Miller of Keokuk to the United States Supreme Court. He invited Annie Turner Wittenmyer of Keokuk to the White House, and together they laid the foundations of the Diet Kitchens that saved many a soldier's life during the Civil War. His only surviving son, Robert Todd Lincoln, married the daughter of James Harlan, and the Harlan-Lincoln Home at Mount Pleasant (where Robert T. and Mary Harlan Lincoln lived) is one of Iowa's prized possessions.

When the nation and the world honored the one hundredth anniversary of Lincoln's birth in 1909, the eyes of Iowa were naturally focused on the ceremonies at Hodgenville, Kentucky, where President Theodore Roosevelt laid the cornerstone of the beautiful marble structure that houses the log cabin in which Lincoln was born and where he lived the first two years of his life. The exercises at Springfield, Illinois, shared honors with the Hodgenville ceremonies, for three nations paid tribute to Lincoln at Springfield — England was represented by Ambassador James Bryce, France by her Ambassador, Jules Jusserand, and the United States by William Jennings Bryan of Nebraska and Senator Jonathan P. Dolliver of Iowa. Dolliver was chosen to lay the American wreath at Lincoln's feet. Before 850 members of the Lin-

coln Centennial Association the silver-tongued orator from Iowa spoke on "Our Heroic Age," referring to that time when Lincoln and the statesmen who stood by his side walked without despair into the "chaos of civil strife," fought "the way of the nation through it, to lift up a spotless flag above it and, in the midst of the flame and the smoke of battle," created a true United States.

Since 1909 the State of Iowa has faithfully cherished the birthday of Abraham Lincoln. It is well that we do so, for in the life of the "Great Emancipator" we have mirrored those qualities which have made Iowa and America great. Lincoln the railsplitter; Lincoln the flatboatman; Lincoln the surveyor; Lincoln the Indian fighter; Lincoln the storekeeper and postmaster; Lincoln the circuit-riding country lawyer and stump-speaking prairie politician — truly here was a man with experiences that could be understood by thousands of Iowa pioneers engaged in transforming a wilderness into the richest agricultural State in the Union.

On February 12, 1909, "Ding" Darling drew a Lincoln cartoon entitled "The Guiding Star of the Republic." In it, "Ding" showed Uncle Sam, backed by Columbia, standing at the pilot wheel guiding the "Ship of State" toward the ever-beckoning profile of Lincoln, blazing resplendently in the starry firmament. Today that "Guiding Star" still shines brightly in the minds of Iowans.

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MILITARY BOUNTY LAND ACT OF 28 SEPTEMBER, 1850.

LAND WARRANT,
No. 52076



(Register and Receiver's
No. 11988)

Land Office, Dubuque

July 21, 1854

We hereby certify, That the attached Military Bounty Land Warrant, No. 52076, was on this day received at this office, from Abraham Lincoln of Sangamon county, State of Illinois

W. H. Mearns Register.
P. S. Quigley Receiver.

I, Abraham Lincoln of Sangamon county, State of Illinois hereby apply to locate and do locate the

North West 1/4 of South West quarter

of Section No. 20 in Township No. 21 N. 10th of Range No. 15 West in the District of Lands subject to sale at the Land Office at Dubuque containing 40 acres, in satisfaction of the attached Warrant numbered 52076 issued under the act of 28 September, 1850.

Witness my hand this 21 day of July A. D. 1854

Attest:
W. H. Mearns Register.
P. S. Quigley Receiver.
by John J. Davis Notary

I request the Patent to be sent to Land Office, Dubuque July 21 1854

We hereby certify, That the above location is correct, being in accordance with law and the instructions.

P. S. Quigley Receiver.
W. H. Mearns Register.

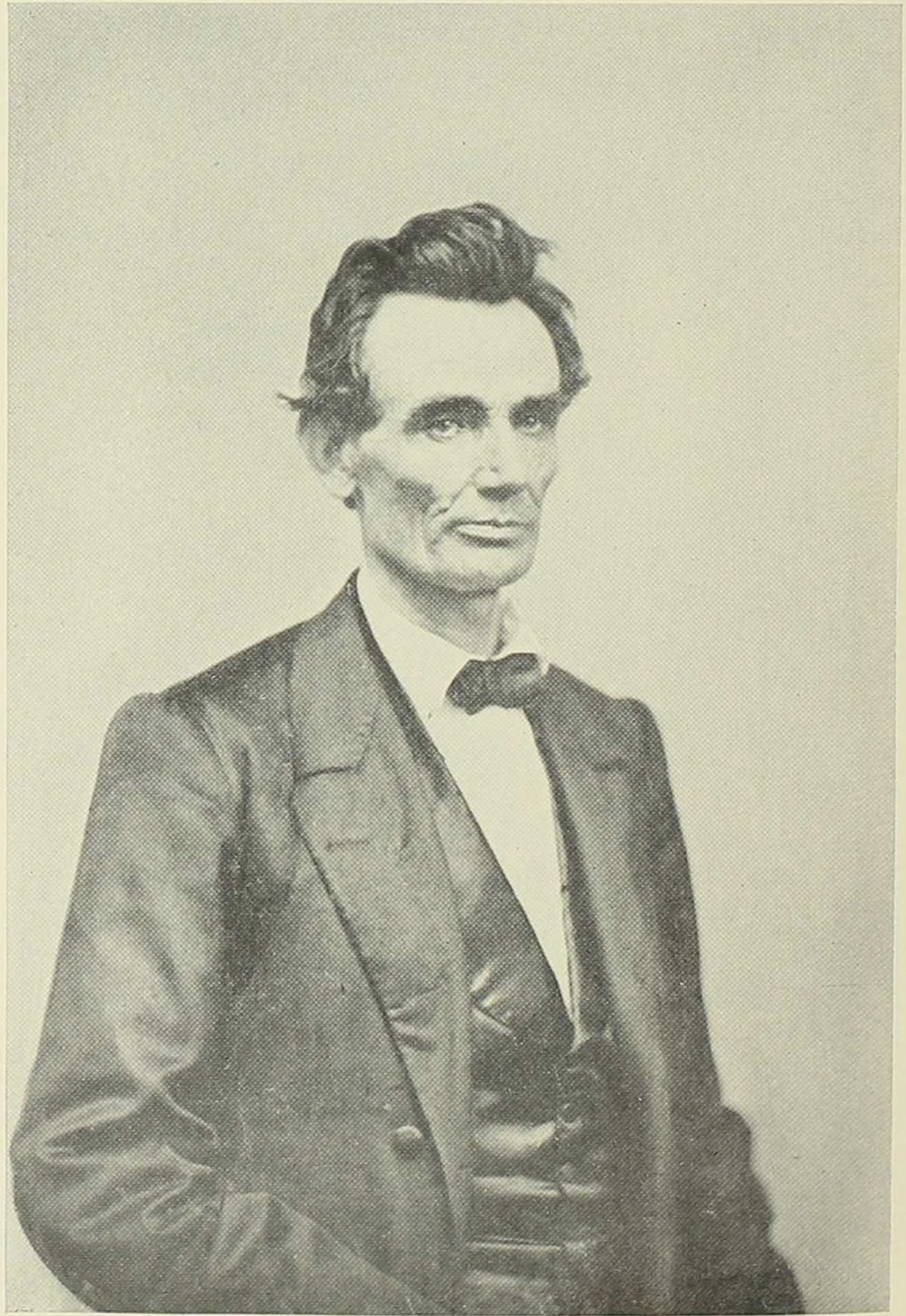


THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES RECORDS OF THE GENERAL LAND OFFICE.
Washington, D. C. Military Bounty Land Warrant No. 52076-40-1850.

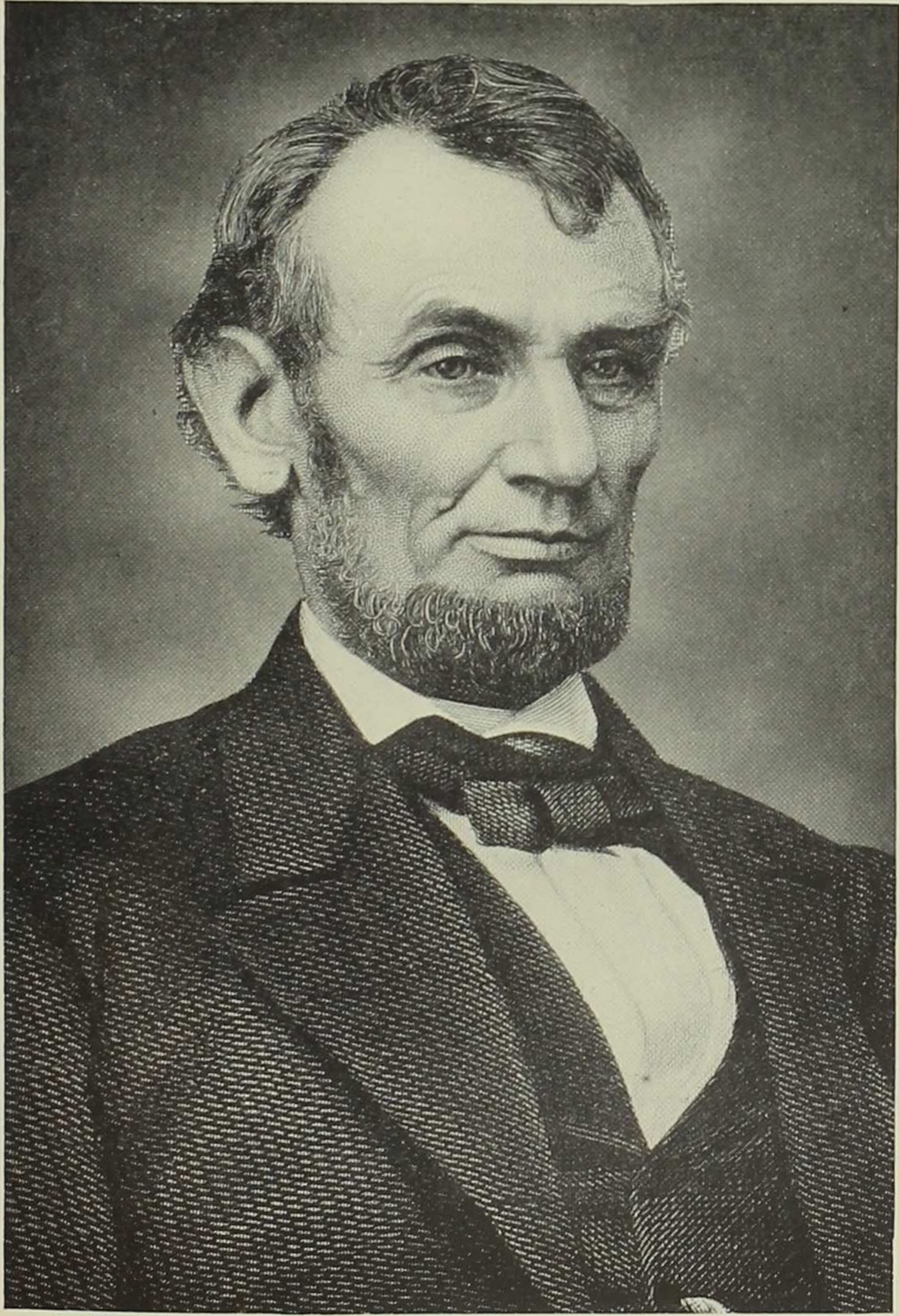
Three Centimeters

Photo Courtesy Illinois State Historical Library

MILITARY BOUNTY LAND WARRANT TO LAND IN TAMA COUNTY

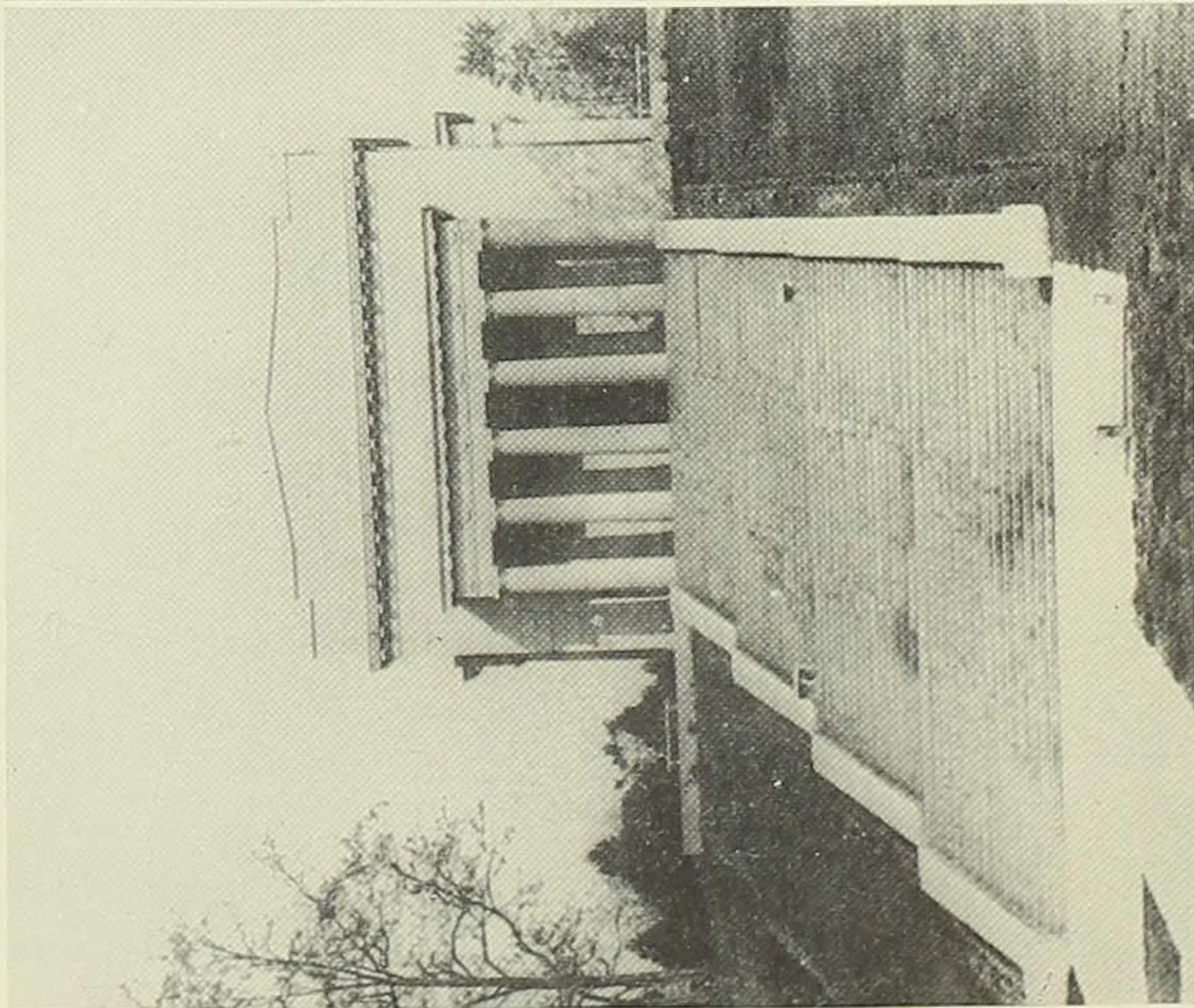


ABRAHAM LINCOLN:
Lawyer for Rock Island Bridge Company



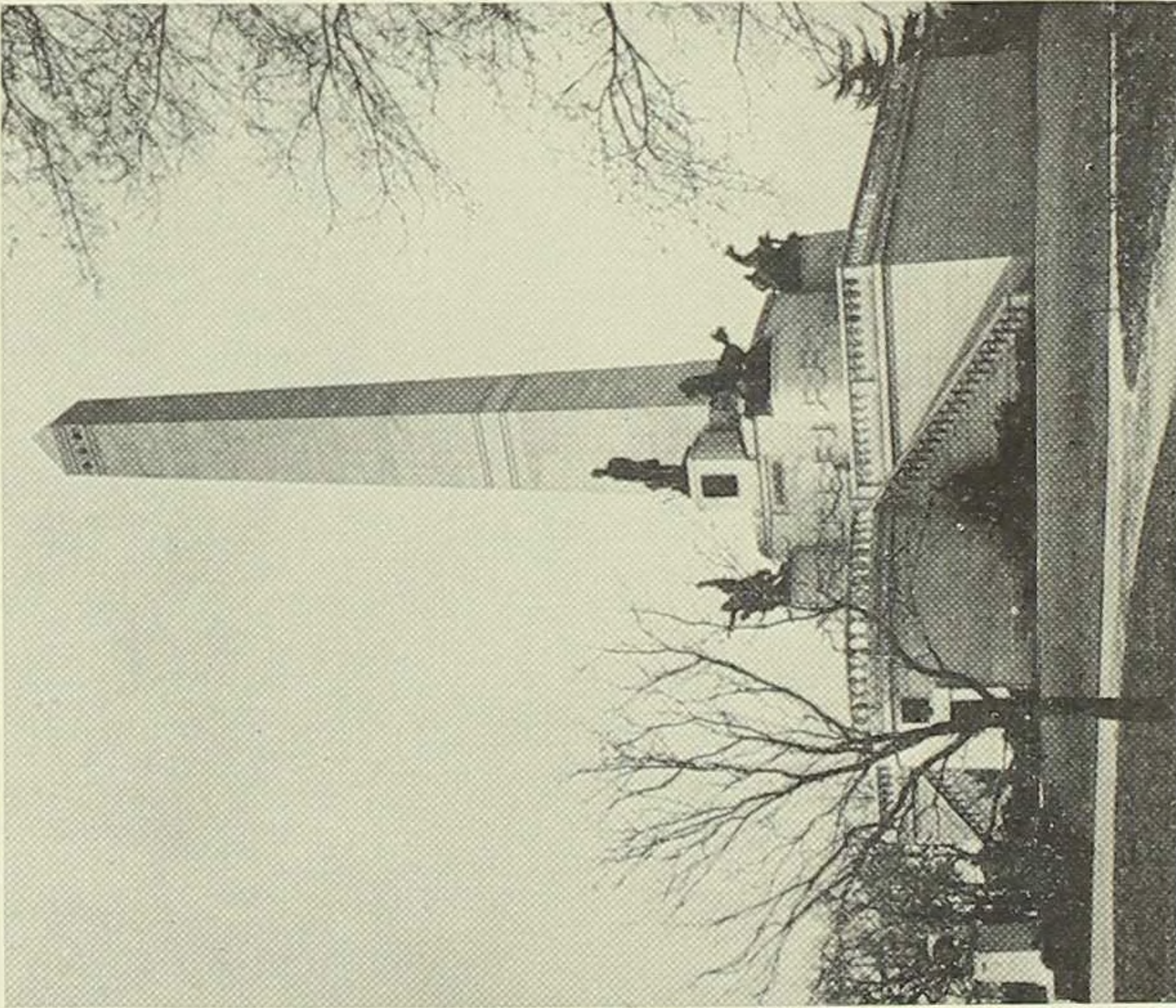
ABRAHAM LINCOLN:
President of the United States

MONUMENTS TO ABRAHAM LINCOLN



Birthplace at Hodgenville

"I was born February 12, 1809 . . . a mile, or a mile and a half, from where Hodgen's mill now is."



Photos Courtesy Illinois State Historical Library

Tomb at Springfield

"There lies the most perfect ruler of men that ever lived."
Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton