

THE PALIMPSEST

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VOL. VI

ISSUED IN APRIL 1925

No. 4

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A Lincoln Pole Raising

The presidential campaign of 1860 is interesting not only on account of its importance but also because of the election methods employed. Both of the great political parties organized bands, marching squadrons, and glee clubs in the principal cities of Iowa, while in the rural communities and smaller towns the enthusiasm was scarcely less manifest. Rallies, processions, picnics, and barbecues were the order of the day throughout the State. The raising of a Lincoln flagpole furnished the opportunity for an outburst of enthusiasm and a celebration not to be surpassed by any of the more common political activities.

On July 28, 1860, approximately two thousand people gathered in Jackson Township, Henry County, Iowa, for the purpose of promoting Lincoln's candidacy by the erection of a flagpole. Republican farmers of the neighborhood, chief among whom

were William F. Jones and W. C. Woodworth, sponsored the celebration. The place selected was the convenient spot on the old Burlington to Agency military highway at the junction with the road leading to Hugh Boyle's grist mill on the Skunk River a mile north. At that central point the people were accustomed to assemble for the celebration of the Fourth of July, and there was the rendezvous of the home guards during the Civil War. So intense was the excitement in 1860 and so earnest were the people that they came from miles around to attend this political rally at the important country crossroads where north and south traffic between Mount Pleasant and Lee County towns crossed the artery of the east and west travel to and from Burlington. Lincoln Poles were erected in many towns but the raising of one in the country was unique. A newspaper reported that "many ladies graced the occasion with their presence, good looks and smiles of approval."

Primitive pioneer methods were used in constructing and raising the pole. Four perfectly straight trees of different sizes were selected so as to form a strong, uniformly tapering pole when spliced. The ends of the trees were then hewn at a long angle and laid together. Through the splices two-inch auger holes were bored into which wooden pins were driven. Strong iron bands of the proper sizes were then slipped over the small end of the pole and pounded down over the tapering splices. A heavy

log, about twelve or fifteen feet in length, was used for the base, into which the lower section of the pole was mortised and firmly braced laterally. When the pole was finished, a trench, long and wide enough to admit the base log, was dug to the depth of about eight feet. This contrivance was designed to prevent the pole from swinging sideways or overbalancing as it was being raised.

Long pikes with iron spikes in the end were provided for the men who were to do the actual work of raising the pole. Ropes were attached to the top of the pole for the purpose of steadying it in the course of erection. A heavy, forked pole was also ready to be used for steering the flagpole and holding it in place between hoists.

When all was in readiness a captain was chosen and the work of raising began. The small end of the pole was lifted from the ground, the pikes were jabbed in, the ropes were manned, and the guide pole put in place. "Heave, O heave!" cried the captain. All together the pike men heaved with all their might. The great pole raised a few feet, the guide pole was slid farther down to bear the weight, and the men rested from their strenuous efforts. Again and again this process was repeated. Gradually the base log slipped into the trench and at last the pole stood erect with the earth tamped firmly around the base.

How the eager throng cheered when the work was done! From the top, a hundred feet above the

ground, floated a large American flag about eight by fifteen feet in dimensions. Inscribed on the banner in large letters were the names of Lincoln and Hamlin.

In raising the pole one error was made. When the guy ropes were attached to the top no one thought of tying them so they could be loosened from the ground. After the pole was in place the guy ropes were still hanging from the top, and a means of releasing them became the problem of the hour. Finally, John Hall, who lived in the vicinity, volunteered to climb the pole. He ascended to the top, using nothing but his bare hands and feet, released the ropes, dropped them to the ground, and descended without injury to himself, although he was much exhausted. Later, young Hall enlisted in the Union army, and never returned.

After the pole raising had been completed, a bounteous picnic dinner was spread by the women, and all were invited to partake freely. Dinner over, the speaking began. A large "Wigwam" had been previously erected, in which the meeting was held. Samuel McFarland of Mount Pleasant was the principal orator of the day. His vigorous speech, described as "one of his very best," caused great enthusiasm. McFarland afterward became lieutenant colonel of the Nineteenth Iowa Infantry and was killed in 1862 at the battle of Prairie Grove, Arkansas.

Two or three days after the big rally, some mis-

creant, probably under the guise of campaigning for the Democratic party, razed the Lincoln Pole to the ground. This act of vandalism so far violated approved methods of campaigning that it was criticised even by followers of "The Little Giant", while among Republicans it was universally denounced. G. W. Edwards, editor of the Mount Pleasant *Home Journal*, commented as follows: "We learn that some villainous Douglasite has bored down the Pole raised by the Jackson Township Republicans. We should be very sorry to trust a flock of sheep near the residence of a man who would be guilty of such an act, and it is to be hoped that the perpetrator will be discovered and held up to the contempt of the community, as he deserves to be."

Not disheartened by the loss of their Lincoln Pole, erected with so much labor, the Jackson Township Republicans made another pole, taller and better than the first, and held a second celebration. I shall never forget the erection of that Lincoln Pole. As a small boy, I went with my father, Joel C. Garretson, and William F. Jones to the Prairie Creek bottoms to cut the forked steering pole to be used in hoisting the flagpole. A suitable tree was soon secured. As it was being dragged along, the front end struck a stump or a stone and the other end swung around suddenly, hit me with terrific force, and threw me to the ground. Mr. Jones pulled me from under the tree, examined my leg, and remarked that there wasn't any bone in it or it would have been broken.

One leg was so badly lacerated, however, that a scar remained as a permanent reminder of Lincoln Poles and the campaign of 1860.

The second pole raising was characterized by even more enthusiasm than the first. Invitations were extended to Republicans of the surrounding towns, many of whom responded. Mount Pleasant "turned out a delegation about a hundred strong, including the Wide Awakers", while Salem was represented by three or four hundred men and women. Pilot Grove, Primrose, and other places to the south in Lee County sent large delegations. By noon of August 9th, almost "one thousand persons were on the ground." Some came on foot, others on horseback, but most of them rode in farm wagons. One six-horse team and several four-horse teams were there, bedecked with American flags.

Two bands and the Wide Awake Glee Club added materially to the entertainment. Several Wide Awake marching clubs attracted considerable attention. They wore black oilcloth caps and shoulder capes. Usually officered by a veteran of the Mexican War, they were drilled according to the infantry manual of that day. At the pole raising they presented a rather spectacular appearance as they went through their maneuvers. One spectator voiced a sentiment that must have been in the minds of many that day, "This looks like war, and I believe we are going to have war."

The first attempt to hoist the pole failed. When

it was partly up the middle splice broke and the top half came down with a crash. No one was hurt, however, and in about an hour the pole was respliced. The second attempt succeeded without accident. This pole was fully eighteen inches in diameter at the base and extended a hundred and twenty feet into the air "as straight as an arrow". When the flag was run up, the crowd gave three cheers "and three groans for the scamp who bored down the other pole."

"A free dinner was prepared by the ladies of the neighborhood, of which the multitude partook with a will." After dinner, Rufus L. B. Clark of Mount Pleasant delivered an address. He spoke for about an hour and those who heard him said that he made a "capital speech". When he concluded, six cheers were given for the speaker and three more for "Honest Abe".

The second Lincoln Pole was not molested, and stood until after the election. When the first news of Lincoln's victory came, a large placard was tacked to the pole bearing the well-known words of Commodore Perry: "We have met the enemy and they are ours."

Time effaces all things. The Lincoln Pole was soon destroyed and forgotten. The historic Burlington and Agency road, over which government troops once marched to their outposts on the border, was later one of the thoroughfares of western migration. Thousands of prairie schooners lumbered

along that route. To-day it is merely a side road used only by local citizens. Hugh Boyle's famous mill, once the nucleus of an important industry in that region, is no more. But at the site of the pole raising, the old oaken base log probably still lies buried where it was placed by the zealous adherents of Abraham Lincoln almost sixty-five years ago.

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