

LINCOLN LORE

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THE EAST SCRUTINIZES A WESTERNER

Steps to the Wigwam, No. 7

Each step which Abraham Lincoln took in approaching the Chicago Wigwam seems to have been made deliberately and with a full realization of its importance as a contributing factor to his political advancement. The significance of Abraham Lincoln's appearance at Cooper Institute, New York City, on the night of February 27, 1860, has been somewhat obscured by the erroneous supposition that it was but a stop en route to visit with his son, then in school at Exeter, New Hampshire. By the time Lincoln received the invitation to visit New York the political importance of such an appearance far outweighed any filial considerations which he may have entertained.

The Lincoln Papers in the Library of Congress are contributing to a better understanding of many episodes in the life of Abraham Lincoln. The steps to the Wigwam no longer appear as isolated events but become closely related and coordinated. Each incident seems to be largely dependent on the episode which has preceded it. Three days after the strategic debate at Freeport, Illinois, on August 27, 1858, James A. Briggs of New York wrote to Lincoln stating in part: "There is a deep interest felt here in the Illinois election contest. I hope you will win a great and glorious victory. Judge Douglas last winter had a noble position. He has lost it now. He was not the *Man of the Hour*."

By the spring of 1859 Lincoln's political ambitions for some recognition in the 1860 campaign began to send their roots down a little deeper. Apparently his note to T. J. Pickett of Rock Island on March 5 stating, "I do not think I am fit for the Presidency," was not very convincing because Pickett wrote to him a week later as to "the policy of announcing your name for the Presidency." The day after Pickett's communication Salmon Portland Chase wrote to Lincoln as follows: "Permit me to congratulate you on the present aspect of the Republican cause." Then referring to the debates he said, "The people will not forget the champion who merited, if circumstances did not permit him to achieve, victory."

Coming from such a prominent figure as Chase this must have encouraged Lincoln to think of still further cultivating the good will of the people in nearby states. Possibly the most significant visit was to Chase's own state, Ohio. The reaction to his speeches were so enthusiastic that he could have had no further doubt about being "fit" for a presidential candidacy at least. Sam Galloway wrote from Columbus on Oct. 13: "His (Chase's) nomination for the presidency would sink us. . . . Your name should be used in the canvass for candidates. Your visit to Ohio has created an extensive interest in you." A by-product of the Ohio visit was the publication of the Lincoln-Douglas Debates.

Previous to the Ohio visit, which called for speeches at Columbus, Dayton, Hamilton, and Cincinnati, and also at Indianapolis, en route to Illinois, Lincoln had gone to Iowa for a speech at Council Bluffs. Wishing to extend his political influence still further, he reached north to Wisconsin and spoke at Milwaukee, Beloit, and Janesville. Kansas was the next state cultivated and speeches were arranged at Elwood, Troy, Doniphan, Atchison, and finally, Leavenworth, which was his point of destination.

Apparently the visits of Lincoln to Ohio and Wisconsin stirred up the New York Republicans as on October 12, 1859, Lincoln received the following telegram from James A. Briggs of New York, the same Briggs who had complimented him so highly during the debates.

A copy of the telegram follows:

"Hon. A. Lincoln

Will you speak in Mr. Beecher's church Brooklyn on or about twenty-ninth (29) November on any subject you please pay two hundred (200) dollars.

James A. Briggs"

Now Lincoln sees an opportunity to extend his influence eastward and decides to give the easterners an opportunity to scrutinize a westerner, and he advised James A. Briggs, his New York correspondent: "I will be on hand, and in due time notify you of the exact date. I believe, after all I shall make a political speech of it." By February 15th arrangements for Lincoln's visit to New York were completed and he received a note from Briggs stating, "The committee will advertise you for the evening of the twenty-seventh with hope that you will be in good health, and spirit, as you will meet here in this great commercial metropolis a right cordial welcome."

Three days before he delivered his Cooper Institute speech this appeal came from C. B. Post of Hartford, Conn.:

"Our opponents are moving 'heaven and earth' to cut down our small majority, knowing full well this is their last chance for breaking the Republican front in New England and we will feel bound to call upon all friends of the cause to help us in our emergency." The same day a call came from Reading, Penn. All this before the address itself. After the speech a deluge of requests for speeches reached Lincoln before he returned home.

Hiram Barney wrote Lincoln the day after the Cooper Union effort: "The Tribune has a good report of the words of your speech, what a pity it cannot give the manner of it. It was a rare treat last night that the Republicans of New York enjoyed."

The New England itinerary planned for Lincoln during the visit to the east was extended considerably and while it has been argued that Lincoln purposely evaded speaking in Massachusetts, on both his way to and from New Hampshire, he did have an invitation to address the state convention at Worcester. A prominent Boston Republican was greatly disappointed because he did not speak in the Hub City. Possibly the real cause for not speaking in Massachusetts is found in this advice from E. A. Rollins who stated that although Massachusetts would like very much to have him, "Yet I certainly think the Connecticut people need you more and have more right to claim you."

We have mentioned the letter written to Lincoln during the Debates in 1858 by James A. Briggs who advised Lincoln that the east was interested in the contest. We have observed that it was Briggs who was largely responsible for Lincoln's appearance at Cooper Institute. It was this same James A. Briggs who at the close of Lincoln's speech at the Institute was called upon for a comment and this is what he said:

"One of the three gentlemen, fellow-citizens, will be our standard bearers this year in the Presidential contest: the distinguished senator from New York, Wm. H. Seward; the late able and distinguished governor of Ohio, Salmon P. Chase; or the 'Unknown Knight' who entered the political lists against the Bois-Guilbert of Democracy, Stephen A. Douglas, and unhorsed him—Abraham Lincoln."

Back home in Illinois friends were getting reports about the reaction to Lincoln's speeches in the East. C. D. Hay wrote, "Nothing has transpired recently to so much advance your interests and elevate you in the minds of the people as that short trip." The Cooper Institute speech, and the events associated with it, contained the ingredients of a very important step to the Wigwam.