

LINCOLN LORE

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ILLINOIS STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

All students of Abraham Lincoln are under a deep sense of obligation to the Illinois State Historical Society for their many valuable contributions to Lincolniana and for the preservation of source material relating to the life of the Emancipator. Therefore the Golden Anniversary Meeting of the society held at Springfield on October 7 and 8 becomes a milestone of note in the annals of memorial celebrations.

On May 19, 1899 the trustees of the State Historical Library at Springfield sponsored a conference of historically minded citizens to be held at the University of Illinois to consider the advisability of organizing a state historical society. Favorable reaction to the project caused a planning committee to be appointed whose report was submitted at a meeting on June 30, 1899 at Springfield and the organization perfected.

The first annual meeting of the society was held at Bradley Polytechnic Institute at Peoria on January 5 and 6, 1900. One of the most important speeches was by Major George Murray McConnell on "Recollections of Stephen A. Douglas." The Golden Anniversary meeting presented its counterpart when Allan Nevins addressed the Sponsor's Dinner group on Stephen A. Douglas.

The first annual meeting also had on its program General James M. Ruggles who spoke on Congressional Reminiscences which gave him an opportunity to bring in both Lincoln and Douglas. At the Golden Anniversary Dinner G. William Horsley as Lincoln, and S. Phil Hutchinson as Douglas, put on a skit from the Lincoln Douglas Debates.

One of the most important questions which confronted the members at the first annual meeting was "whether this society should undertake the formation of an independent library in addition to those already in the process of formation?" Hon. George N. Black, one of the Trustees of the society gave a report on historical materials in the State Historical Library at Springfield, which undoubtedly had much to do in forming the policy of the society in respect to supporting the State Historical Library which was established in 1889.

In the course of his remarks Mr. Black referred to the Collection of Lincolniana at the library in these words:

"One of the greatest features of the State Historical Library is its Lincolniana. The present board of trustees are following in the footsteps of their predecessors in their most earnest efforts to secure everything possible regarding our martyr president. The library has secured from the Sangamon county court records many original Lincoln papers. For instance, it has poll lists showing the record of Mr. Lincoln's first vote; the record showing him as clerk of election; and others in which he is a petitioner for public roads.

"Besides these, it has the marriage license, and clergyman's return of the marriage of Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd, dated Nov. 4, 1842. These and many other Lincoln documents form a collection such as can not be

shown by any other state library in the United States. On the life and labors of Lincoln, the library contains about eighty bound volumes, and more than fifty pamphlets, with countless magazine and newspaper articles, and sketches from other books, upon his kindred and contemporaneous persons and events. It also possesses several fine portraits of Mr. Lincoln, among them being a beautiful platinum print from the celebrated original 'Hessler' photograph; Marshall's engraved portrait, and others of great interest. Just here I wish to say that the trustees earnestly desire to obtain from friends of the library, any books, pamphlets or documents bearing in any way upon the history of Mr. Lincoln, because they are most anxious to make this collection of 'Lincolniana' the greatest and most complete in the land. It is surely fitting that Illinois, who gave him to the nation, and within whose domain his sacred ashes are entombed, should lead all other states in collecting memorials to his honor, his honesty and his fame."

Possibly the Lincoln theme has overshadowed any of the other historical interests in which the Society has specialized. In the thinking of most of the Lincoln students the Illinois State Library, the Illinois State Historical Society, and the Abraham Lincoln Association at Springfield comprise a closely cooperating federation which are more or less dependent one upon the other. The fact that the Abraham Lincoln Association has never attempted to build a library of its own is a fine testimonial to the outstanding collection of Lincolniana at the State Library, supplemented some years ago by the bequest which brought the Governor Horner collection to its shelves.

Fifty years ago the trustees of the library could not possibly have visualized the tremendous growth of its Lincoln Archives. They would have been surprised indeed if they could have visualized a whole village rebuilt where Lincoln spent his early years in Illinois.

The pilgrimage to New Salem which took place on Saturday attracted the largest group of any of the sessions of the Golden Anniversary meeting. Mrs. Fern Nance Pond, who is probably the best posted person on the history of New Salem and its reconstruction, personally conducted the group through the village and shared with the delegates the rich store of reminiscences and bits of folklore which she has gathered.

Carl Sandburg, the most popular of all the writers on Abraham Lincoln, was the speaker of the day and delightfully entertained the pilgrims with historical sketches and songs of the frontier days. The luncheon at noon was served in the famous Wagon Wheel Restaurant on the New Salem grounds.

Jay Monaghan, secretary of the association and the sponsors who shared with him in making the arrangements for observing the Golden Anniversary meeting, should be complimented on setting up a program which included the governor of the state and many other prominent statesmen and students of history.