

# LINCOLN LORE

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## SOURCES FOR LINCOLN'S 1832 SPEECH

The first writing which Abraham Lincoln is known to have addressed to the public appeared in the Sangamon Journal published at Springfield, Illinois for March 15, 1832. It was an announcement of his candidacy for representative in the Illinois legislature. It is an interesting political document and gives evidence that preliminary to this well prepared and logically arranged discussion there must have been other speeches which he delivered. It might be of interest to try and discover the sources on which Lincoln drew for this early speech.

It seems to be accepted generally that Lincoln as a youth in Indiana prepared a speech entitled "National Politics." A Rockport, Indiana attorney on reading it stated, "The world can't beat it," and it is said to have been published in a newspaper of that time. While it has not been preserved either in manuscript or print, one early authority states it contained the following expression:

"The American government is the best form of government for an intelligent people; it ought to be kept sound and preserved forever. . . . General education should be fostered and carried all over the country, and the constitution should be saved, the Union perpetuated and the laws revered, respected and enforced."

Relying upon tradition again it is stated that a few weeks after the Lincolns settled some ten miles west of Decatur in Illinois, a political rally was held in the town where it was announced that two candidates for the legislature would speak. Lincoln was present and when the candidates were through it is said that John Hanks jumped up on the speakers stump and announced that he had a friend by the name of Lincoln who had recently come over from Indiana who could beat those two speeches all to thunder. The sequel to the tradition claims that Lincoln did beat the other speakers all to thunder. The tradition further holds that the candidates were so impressed with the young orator that they encouraged Lincoln to run for a seat in the Illinois legislature, which he did at the next biennial election in 1832 as indicated by his first printed speech being featured in this bulletin.

Coming to the speech published in the Sangamon Journal, although it was dated March 9 and published on March 14, it was not until April 25 that a formal announcement of Lincoln's candidacy appeared as follows:

"We are authorized to state that A. Lincoln of New Salem is a candidate for representative for this county."

The introductory paragraph of the address is admirably done with proper attention given to conventional procedure and the announcement of the scope of his efforts, as set forth in these words.

"Fellow citizens: Having become a candidate for the honorable office of one of your representatives in the next general assembly of this state, in an accordance with an established custom, and the principles of true Republicanism, it becomes my duty to make known to you—the people whom I propose to represent—my sentiments with regards to local affairs."

The primarily local interest which Lincoln presents is "The Improvement of the Sangamon River," which he discusses under the subject of Internal Improvements, one of the major projects of the Whig Party. He first presents a generally accepted fact that good roads and

navigable streams are necessary for adequate transportation, and continues: "Yet it is folly to undertake works of this or any other kind without first knowing that we are able to finish them—as half finished work generally proves to be labor lost."

Lincoln admits that railroads and canals are most desirable and agrees that "No other improvement that reason will justify us in hoping for can equal in utility the Railroad . . . the regular progress of commercial intercourse is not interrupted by either high or low water or freezing weather, which are the principal difficulties that render our future hopes of water communication precarious and uncertain." Yet he concludes, "However desirable an object of the construction of a railroad through the country may be: however high our imaginations may be heated at thoughts of it—there is always a heart-appealing shock accompanying the amount of its cost."

The logical conclusion which he draws from his considerations with respect to roads, canals and railroads is "the belief that the improvement of the Sangamon River is an object much better suited to our infant resources."

Lincoln then approached the main body of his argument and set forth his qualifications for speaking with some authority on the subject. He stated: "From my peculiar circumstances, it is probable that for the last twelve months I have given as particular attention to the stage of the water in this river as any other in the county," and then reviews other observations of importance which hinders navigation and comes to the conclusion that, "The drifted timber . . . is the most formidable barrier to this object." The last thirty miles or so to be improved he feels presents the real problem and suggests that as "This route is on prairie-land the whole distance, so that it appears to me, by removing the turf a sufficient width, and damming up the old channel, the whole river in a short time would wash its way through thereby curtailing the distance and increasing the velocity of the current very considerably."

This suggestion may well have come from an experience which he had on one of his flat boat adventures to New Orleans when upon the return trip the steamer on which he had taken passage came through a new channel which was dry land on the way down. He brings to a close the main argument with this conclusion:

"Finally, I believe that the improvement of the Sangamon River, to be vastly important and highly desirable to the people of this country."

Three other local minor subjects are discussed: "Exorbitant rates of interest" which he laments, "Education" which he hopes may "become more general" and alterations of existing laws with respect to "estrays laws, the law respecting the issuing of executions and the road law." He brings his argument to a close with a personal note in which he admits his youth and the absence of any "wealthy or popular relations to recommend" him. He concludes, "If the good people in their wisdom shall see fit to keep me in the background, I have been too familiar with disappointment to be very much chagrined."