

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN—PRESIDENTIAL ELECTOR, 1840

Considering the fact that the leading citizens of Illinois were attracted to politics in the early history of the state, the political advancement of Abraham Lincoln during his first decade in Illinois is phenomenal. He arrived in Decatur at twenty-one years of age, a wood chopper and flatboat hand with "no wealthy or popular relations or friends to recommend" him. Ten years later at thirty-one years of age he had served three biennial terms in the Illinois legislature, was the minority leader in the House, had just been appointed on the five man Whig State Central Committee, and also chosen one of the five Illinois presidential electors for William Henry Harrison.

Not only had his advancement politically been remarkable but now at thirty-one years of age the former railsplitter had been admitted to the bar, had become a law partner of John T. Stuart then a congressman from Illinois, and while Stuart was serving in congress at Washington, Lincoln was conducting the affairs of the law firm. Aside from his political and professional advancement, at thirty-one years of age the former backwoodsman was living in the State capitol city, was socially prominent having become engaged to the aristocratic Mary Todd, daughter of the president of the Bank of Kentucky. If there was ever a time when the son of Thomas Lincoln felt that fate had been especially kind to him, it must have been during that season when he was a presidential elector for William Henry Harrison in the political campaign of 1840.

There is evidence that Abraham Lincoln as a presidential elector never forgot this first taste of national politics. Frank B. Carpenter in his book *Six Months in the White House* states that on February 9, 1864 in conference with Judge Advocate General Holt while they were reviewing many findings of the military courts requiring the President's signature and date line, Lincoln asked this question: "Does your mind, Judge Holt, associate events with dates?" Lincoln then continued, "Every time this morning that I have had occasion to write the day of the month, the thought has come up: 'This was General Harrison's Birthday.'" By 1864, President Harrison had been dead for twenty-three years.

This reminiscence which took Lincoln back to his thirty-first year gives some emphasis to a letter he wrote on Jan. 20, 1840 to his law partner Stuart then at Washington. Lincoln wrote: "Be sure to send me as many copies of the life of Harrison as you can spare from other uses." It would be of interest to know just which Harrison campaign biography Stuart sent to Lincoln as several were in print; there are six of them before the editor of Lincoln Lore just now. Three of the books were published in cloth bindings, one by James Hall at Philadelphia in 1836, another by Richard Hildreth at Boston in 1839, and the third by Samuel J. Burr in 1840.

Our thought is, however, that all of the following three biographies in paper covers were made available for wide distribution and one or possibly all of them may have come into Lincoln's hands. All three were published in Philadelphia in 1840: *General William Henry Harrison, Candidate of the People*, published by Jesper Harding and stereotyped by L. Johnson, 16 pages; *The Life of William Henry Harrison, The People's Candidate*, copyrighted by W. Marshall & Co., C. Sherman

& Co. printers, 60 pages; and *The Life of Major-General William Henry Harrison*, copyrighted by T. K. & R. G. Collins and published by Grigg & Elliot, 93 pages.

The last title appeared in both boards and paper, the paper pamphlet selling for \$15.00 per hundred and the board bindings for an additional \$3.00. The Foundation is fortunate in having both issues. On the flyleaf of the cloth copy is this inscription: "George Emmerick's Book February 27, 1840." It is interesting to note on the back cover, the printed statement that the book "will be ready for delivery by the 15th of February 1840." The first chapter of this book opens with the statement, "William Henry Harrison was born in Virginia, on the 9th day of February 1773." Possibly Lincoln remembered that date by associating it with his own birthday but three days later.

However, a much cheaper pamphlet was published by Jesper Harding which was priced at \$10.00 per 1000, or \$1.50 per 100." The front cover illustration displayed an equestrian portrait of Harrison and on the back cover "Battle of Tippecanoe." The source for this pamphlet is cited as "the authentic history of McAfee on the late war." The pamphlet stresses Harrison's military appointments in the west under Wayne, and his services as Secretary of the Northwestern Territory; Governor of Indiana Territory; Commander-in-chief of the Northwestern Army; Commissioner to treat with the Indians; member of Congress and Senator from Ohio. Lincoln would read with appreciation this testimony about Harrison: "Of the career of Gen. Harrison, I need not speak—the history of the West is his history."

It is interesting to note in one of these 1840 biographies of Harrison his attitude towards slavery. He states: "I am accused of being friendly to slavery. From my earliest youth to the present moment, I have been an ardent friend of Human Liberty. At the age of eighteen I became a member of an abolition society established at Richmond, Virginia; the object of which was to ameliorate the conditions of slaves and procure their freedom by every legal means. . . . The obligations which I then came under I have faithfully performed. . . . I was the first person to introduce into Congress the proposition that all the country above Missouri should never have slavery admitted to it."

As late as 1848 Lincoln remembered Harrison's stand on slavery. In a letter to Usher F. Linder he said: "Your third question is 'and have we as a party, ever gained anything, by falling in company with the abolitionists?' Yes, we gained our only national victory by falling in company with them in the election of General Harrison."

Lincoln entered strenuously into the Harrison-Tyler campaign and his many speaking engagements outside of the judicial circuit he travelled was really his introduction to the state of Illinois. He was especially active in the southern counties going as far south as Galatin and Shawneetown its county seat. From here he crossed over the Ohio River into Kentucky and at Morganfield made his first and only political speech, as far as we know, in the state of his birth. Although Harrison did not carry Illinois, Lincoln did have the satisfaction of seeing his home county go for the Whig candidate in what was known as the hard cider campaign.