

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN—SPONSOR OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Educational institutions which have specialized in agriculture and the mechanical arts operate under a deep sense of obligation to Abraham Lincoln. At a time when vocational education needed a champion, previous efforts to promote it having been vetoed by a former president of the United States, Abraham Lincoln came into power and signed a bill that made possible the establishment of State Universities.

Lincoln's sympathy with educational efforts dates back to his first political speech, made as a candidate for the Legislature of Illinois in 1832, when he was but twenty-three years old. He said:

"Upon the subject of education, not presuming to dictate any plan or system respecting it, I can only say that I view it as the most important subject which we as a people can be engaged in. That every man may receive at least a moderate education, and thereby be enabled to read the histories of his own and other countries, by which he may duly appreciate the value of our free institutions, appears to be an object of vital importance, even on this account alone, to say nothing of the advantages and satisfaction to be derived from all being able to read the Scriptures, and other works both of a religious and moral nature, for themselves.

"For my part, I desire to see the time when education—and by its means, morality, sobriety, enterprise, and industry—shall become much more general than at present, and should be gratified to have it in my power to contribute something to the advancement of any measure which might have a tendency to accelerate that happy period."

Twenty-seven years after this maiden speech, Lincoln was invited to deliver the annual address at the Wisconsin State Fair, held in Milwaukee, September, 1859. After discussing probable improvements in the field of agriculture through discovery and invention and the relation of labor and capital, he concluded: "From these premises the problem springs—'How can labor and education be the most satisfactorily combined?'" In developing his argument he assumed that "free labor insists on universal education . . . education is the natural companion of free labor." The gist of his remarks on education follows:

"This leads to the further reflection, that no other human occupation opens so wide a field for the profitable and agreeable combination of labor with cultivated thought, as agriculture. I know nothing so pleasant to the mind, as the discovery of that which is at once new and valuable—nothing that so lightens and sweetens toil, as the hopeful pursuit of such discovery. And how vast, and how varied a field is agriculture, for such discovery. The mind, already trained to thought, in the country school, or higher school, cannot fail to find there an exhaustless source of enjoyment. Every blade of grass is a study; and to produce two, where there was but one, is both a profit and a pleasure. And not grass alone; but soils, seeds, and seasons—hedges, ditches, and fences, draining, drouths, and irrigation—plowing, hoeing, and harrowing—reaping, mowing, and threshing—saving crops, pests of crops, diseases of crops, and what will prevent or cure them—implements, utensils, and machines, their relative merits and to improve them—hogs, horses, and cattle—sheep, goats, and poultry—trees, shrubs, fruits, plants, and flowers—the thousand

things of which these are specimens—each a world of study within itself.

"In all this, book learning is available. A capacity, and taste, for reading, gives access to whatever has already been discovered by others. It is the key, or one of the keys, to the already solved problems. And not only so. It gives a relish and facility for successfully pursuing the unsolved ones. The rudiments of science are available, and highly valuable. Some knowledge of botany assists in dealing with the vegetable world—with all growing crops. Chemistry assists in the analysis of soils, selection, and application of manures, and in numerous other ways. The mechanical branches of natural philosophy are ready help in almost everything; but especially in reference to implements and machinery.

"The thought recurs that education—cultivated thought—can best be combined with agricultural labor, or any labor, on the principle of thorough work—that careless, half-performed, slovenly work, makes no place for such combination."

On September 10, 1927, President Calvin Coolidge dedicated the Lincoln Memorial Library of the South Dakota State College. On this occasion, in the course of his dedicatory address, he made the following statement with reference to Lincoln's signing the bill providing for a grant of land in the several states to establish educational institutions in agriculture and the mechanical arts:

"It is said that Jonathan B. Turner was the author of this measure, and that before he was nominated Lincoln had told him that if he were chosen president the proposal would have his approval. Representative Morrill, of Vermont, later senator for many years, fathered the bill in the congress and it bears his name. It was passed and signed by President Lincoln on July 2, 1862. Under its provisions 30,000 acres of public land for each of their senators and representatives in the congress were given to each state to be used for the support of a college of agriculture and mechanic arts.

"These grants of land have been greatly supplemented by direct appropriations from the national treasury, until under laws now in existence the annual appropriations made by the congress for this purpose run into millions of dollars.

"All of this is the realization of the vision of Abraham Lincoln, which may have come to him as he rode the circuit over the prairies of Illinois, or as he went up and down the state in the conduct of political campaigns. Its material and spiritual effect upon the well-being of our country is beyond estimation.

"We should all of us remember Lincoln as the great emancipator, the president who guided the nation through four years of internal conflict, who demonstrated beyond future question the national quality of our institutions and the indestructibility of our Union, who removed forever from our soil the stain of human slavery and who possessed a God-given insight into the hearts of the American people. But these elements of his greatness should not be permitted to eclipse the mighty service which he rendered to the cause of vocational education by his advocacy and approval of the measure which established what are usually referred to as our state agricultural colleges."