

# LINCOLN LORE

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## COOPER INSTITUTE AFTERMATH

The address of Abraham Lincoln at Cooper Institute was the most far-reaching political speech which he delivered previous to his inauguration as President. It was the oration which contributed more than any other single effort to his nomination at the Chicago Convention. When it is carefully studied and its aftermath duly appreciated, it becomes a message of unusual significance.

The dynamic influence of the Institute speech is not limited to the very favorable impression which it made upon its hearers, nor can its accepted worth as a widely distributed campaign document overshadow another equally valuable contribution which was to result from its delivery. The psychological effect which the speech had on Abraham Lincoln himself was of tremendous importance and must not be minimized in any attempt to analyze the values accruing from the delivery of the famous address.

It was at Cooper Institute that Abraham Lincoln as a provincial debator and stump speaker emerged from a wilderness forum and achieved the roll of an eloquent statesman speaking on the most important lecture platform in America's greatest city. For the first time in his life Abraham Lincoln here received the nod of approval from the intelligentsia with no less a celebrity than William Cullen Bryant as its spokesman. It was at this time that Lincoln shook off that inferiority complex, the bugaboo of so many truly great men, and planned to strike out boldly for recognition.

Just what Lincoln hoped to gain by accepting an invitation to speak in the east, other than the two hundred dollar fee which would enable him to visit his son then at school in New England, is not known. Possibly the political significance of the engagement did not dawn upon him until he learned upon reaching New York that his address would be delivered in a famous auditorium in that city, rather than in the Brooklyn church where he understood it would be given.

Mr. R. C. McCormick, a member of the committee which greeted Lincoln upon his arrival in New York, states that an old Illinois acquaintance of former years met Lincoln in the city and that the following conversation passed between them:

Lincoln: "Well, B., how have you fared since you left Illinois?"

B: "I have made \$100,000 and lost all. How is it with you, Mr. Lincoln?"

Lincoln: "I have the cottage at Springfield and about \$8,000 in money. If they make me Vice-president with Seward, as some say they will, I hope I shall be able to increase it to \$20,000, and that is as much as any man ought to want."

It will be recalled that at the Philadelphia Convention in 1856, unknown to Lincoln, his name had been submitted as a candidate for the Vice-presidency and one hundred ten votes were cast for him, second only in number to Dayton, the nominee. Lincoln could not have forgotten this remarkable showing at Philadelphia, and with an organized effort on his behalf and with Seward, an eastern-

er, at the head of the ticket his availability as a western man would make his nomination as Vice-president almost certain. The conversation with the old friend in Illinois would seem to confirm that this was in reality his highest hope up to the time of the delivery of the famous Cooper Institute address. It is possible that he thought the eastern visit would contribute something to his candidacy as Vice-president.

Immediately after the congratulatory words and handshaking at Cooper Institute, Lincoln accompanied a few friends to the rooms of the Athenaeum Club where a supper in his honor was served. One of the hosts stated, "All were delighted with the rude good humor of the guest, who was in excellent spirits over his success at the Institute. His jokes were many and mirth provoking in the extreme. At a late hour we parted, impressed with the originality and excellence of his character. There was a magnanimity of bearing, an exposure of heart, and an irrepressible humor altogether refreshing."

It may have been at this complimentary dinner, arranged by members of the Young Men's Republican Club, that Lincoln first concluded that there might be some chance for him to secure the nomination to the higher office rather than the Vice-presidency. He found that this aggressive group of young men were enthusiastic about his speech. They were responsible for having it put in print in a special edition. Lincoln is said to have told a distinguished senator that no acts of his New York friends had pleased him so much as the printing, by this group, of the Cooper Institute speech.

Lincoln gave no indications of the inward feelings which must have been aroused within him by the success of the Cooper Institute speech. As he journeyed through New England he made speeches at many cities in Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Hampshire, but purposely steered clear of Massachusetts which was already pledged to Seward. He most certainly did not wish to appear as a competitor to Seward, yet apparently he did not wish to pledge himself to him.

One who carefully observed Lincoln's itinerary in New England and his reaction to the coming Presidential race has given us this brief summary of Lincoln's behavior:

"During his hurried visit to New York and New England, he (Lincoln) was frequently bantered as to the forthcoming Presidential nomination of the Republicans, the fact being apparent that he was the strong man of the west, but he showed no anxiety in the matter, and constantly expressed the opinion that the party wanted the nomination of Mr. Seward."

Although Lincoln's name had been mentioned by western friends for over a year as a possible candidate for the Presidency, it was not until his return from the east that there seems to be a note of anticipation in his replies to those who broached the subject of his candidacy. There is little doubt but that the Cooper Institute success was the magic performance which gave him confidence to drive on for the nomination to the Presidency.