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## Historical Essays by Dr. Charles Coleman

Charles H. Coleman  
*Eastern Illinois University*

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# **HISTORICAL ESSAYS**

**BY**

**CHARLES H. COLEMAN, Ph.D.**

# Historical Essays

by

CHARLES H. COLEMAN

Department of History  
Eastern Illinois University  
Charleston, Illinois

1962

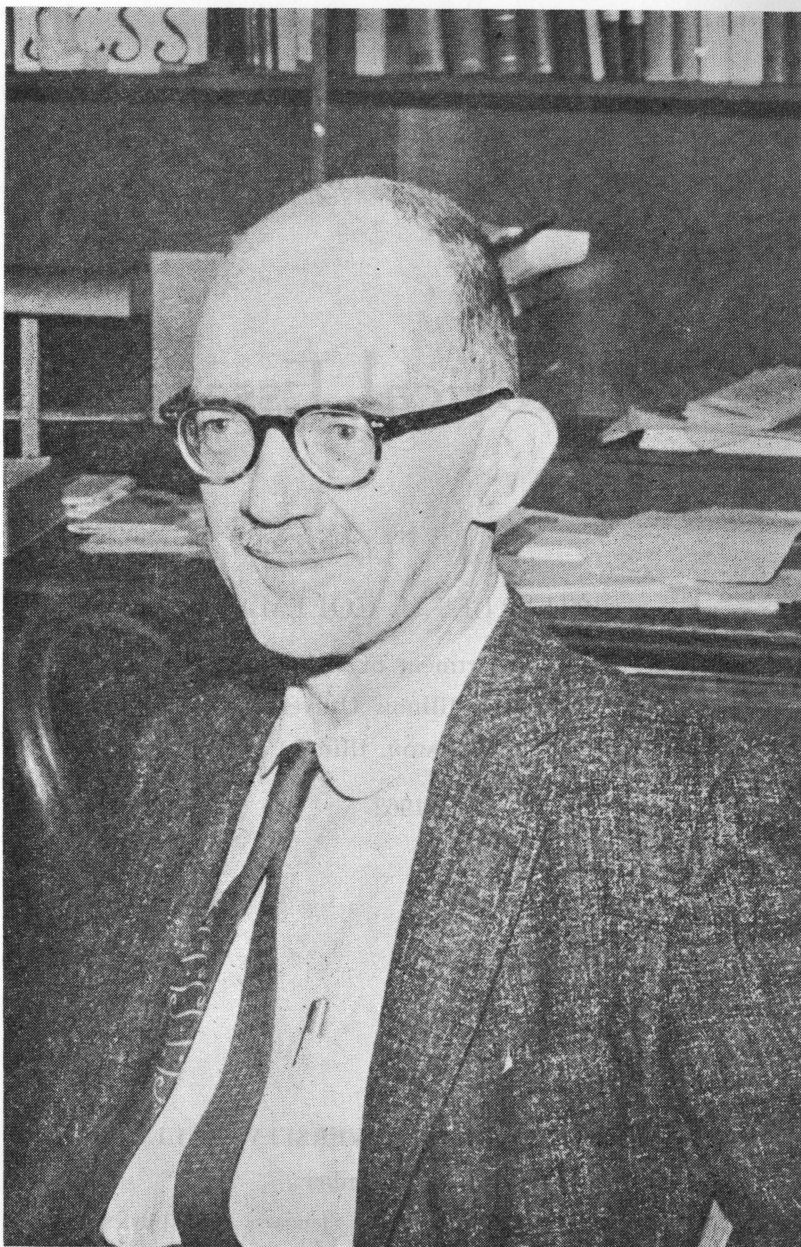
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Charles H. Coleman

## FOREWORD

Texas has produced many notable personalities; I should like to add to that list the name of Charles Hubert Coleman, to whom this issue of the **University Bulletin** is dedicated.

Charlie came from a family that suffered from writer's itch: his grandfather, his father, and his mother were all authors of books. His father felt that he had missed much in life because he was not clever with tools, and for that reason he determined that his son should not suffer from that same handicap. As a boy Charlie was exposed to a great variety of courses in manual arts. I have examined some of his carpentry, and nests of hammer marks bear witness to my conviction that the world of practical arts suffered no irreparable loss when Charlie's ambitions shifted to the study of history.

His interest in that subject goes back to the fifth grade when he devoured the historical tales of Henty, books unknown to modern youngsters. In those early days he decided that he would be a teacher of history, and his decision never wavered. He did his graduate work at Columbia University. While there, he was a reader for Professor Henry Johnson, who had gone to that institution from Eastern. In 1926, when Eastern needed a history teacher, Professor Johnson recommended only one candidate, Charlie Coleman.

A host of former students remember him as an energetic, well-informed, kindly teacher. Certainly he is entitled to look back over his enviable accomplishments with a great deal of satisfaction.

January 1, 1962

Kevin Guinagh

HENRY E. HUNTINGTON  
LIBRARY AND ART GALLERY  
San Marino, California

January 7, 1962

Department of History  
Eastern Illinois University  
Charleston, Illinois

Gentlemen:

Two groups will be especially prominent among the many friends and admirers of Charles H. Coleman who send him affectionate greetings on the occasion of his retirement from Eastern Illinois University. One, of course, is made up of the thousands of students who have profited from his inspiring and conscientious instruction; the other is composed of the men and women who have read his writings: — his history of the university, his book on Lincoln's father and boyhood home, and his other works. But a third and more select group ought not to be forgotten. When Dr. Coleman passed through the graduate school of history in Columbia University, he made a delightful and lasting impression upon his teachers and fellow students alike. His keen intellectual curiosity, his interest in ideas, his wide reading, and not least, his warm and genial disposition, attracted everyone. I can speak with authority upon this, for I was one of his teachers then, as I am proud to say I have been one of his friends ever since.

A great band of people young and old, East and West, will feel a momentary fellowship in pausing to salute the rare spirit many will call Dr. Coleman — to me, always Charley Coleman.

Sincerely yours,

Allan Nevins

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The History Department of Eastern Illinois University acknowledges its appreciation to the various journals and presses which kindly gave permission to reprint Dr. Coleman's essays. Specific references to these publications are listed with each essay.

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# The Half-Faced Camp In Indiana ---Fact or Myth?\*

“The structure, when completed, was fourteen feet square, and was built of small unhewn logs. In the language of the day, it was called a ‘half-faced camp,’ being enclosed on all sides but one. It had neither floor, door, nor windows. In this forbidding hovel these doughty emigrants braved the exposure of the varying elements for an entire year.”<sup>1</sup> This account by William H. Herndon, based on information from Dennis Hanks, Abraham Lincoln’s second cousin, has set the pattern for later biographers of Lincoln in writing about the first structure in which the family of Thomas Lincoln lived upon arriving in Indiana from Kentucky in December 1816.

Writing seventeen years before Herndon and Weik’s book was published, but using the Herndon notes, Ward H. Lamon and Chauncey F. Black wrote in similar vein: “Here [Thomas] Lincoln built ‘a half-faced camp,’—a cabin enclosed on three sides and open on the fourth. It was built, not of logs, but of poles. . . . It was about fourteen feet square, and had no floor. . . . He lived in it, . . . for a whole year.”<sup>2</sup>

Following these accounts, Nicolay and Hay (1890), speak of “‘a half-faced camp’; merely a shed of poles,” in which the family lived “for a whole year.” Ida Tarbell (1900), writes of “the ‘half-face camp’ which for more than a year was the home of the Lincolns.” Likewise, Whitney (1907), refers to “not anything arising to the dignity of a cabin but a **camp**.” Barton (1925), refers to the family’s spending the

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\*Reprinted from the *Abraham Lincoln Quarterly*, Vol. 7 (September, 1952), pp. 138-146.

<sup>1</sup> Herndon’s *Life of Lincoln*, edited by Paul M. Angle (1930), p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Ward H. Lamon, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln* (1872), pp. 21-22.



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first winter in "a 'half-faced camp.' It was a shed of poles. . . ." Sandburg (1926), writes of "a pole-shed or 'half-faced camp'" in which the family lived for a year. Beveridge (1928), who used the Herndon notes, describes "a 'half-faced camp,' such as hunters were wont to throw up as a protection against the weather," in which the family lived "throughout the winter of 1816-1817." Stern (1940) writes of Thomas Lincoln building "a half-faced shelter," which was replaced by a sturdily built cabin which was started in the spring of 1817, although it was not completed when winter commenced again. Randall (1945), mentions only "rigging up a half faced camp in the brush, rearing a log cabin. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

If either repetition or the quality of authorship will establish a fact, the story that the Thomas Lincoln family lived in a three-sided shack or camp during the winter of 1816-1817, if not for a full year, would appear to be beyond contradiction.

On the face of it, the story arouses suspicion. For Thomas Lincoln was a carpenter, and none of his other homes in Kentucky, Indiana or Illinois had been such crude affairs.

The Lincoln family in 1816 included two children, a girl of nine and a boy of seven. A single man, accustomed to "roughing it" on hunting trips, might be willing to live through a winter in such a structure as a "half-faced camp"—but would a man with a wife and two children? Nor was assistance lacking for the erection of a full cabin. There were a number of other settlers in the vicinity (Beveridge

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<sup>3</sup> John G. Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln, A History* (1890), I, 29; Henry C. Whitney, *Life of Abraham Lincoln* (1907 edition), I, 26; Ida M. Tarbell, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln* (1924 edition), I, 22; William E. Barton, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln* (1925), I, 114; Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years* (1926), I, 31; Albert J. Beveridge, *Abraham Lincoln* (1928), I, 42-43; Philip V. Stern, *The Life and Writings of Abraham Lincoln* (1940), p. 9; James G. Randall, *Lincoln the President* (1945), I, 7.

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suggests "perhaps seven families") and community assistance in cabin building was a general custom. Even if Thomas Lincoln did not request such help, it would have been offered to him. Furthermore, the family reached Indiana in December, when farming operations were at a low ebb and time and labor were plentiful.

All of which suggests that an examination of the evidence behind the "half-faced camp" story is in order.

Abraham Lincoln made no reference to such a structure. His autobiographical sketch to Jesse W. Fell, December 20, 1859, states only that "We reached our new home about the time the State came into the Union."<sup>4</sup> Lincoln's June 1860, campaign autobiography refers to "the new log cabin" in which the family was living a few days before Abraham's eighth birthday anniversary on February 12, 1817, and through a crack of which Abraham shot and killed a wild turkey.<sup>5</sup> This would suggest that the cabin had been erected but had not yet been "chinked." In the case of a cabin erected in winter, this is not surprising. The usual chinking material was wet clay and grass ("wattle and daub"), difficult if not impossible to procure and use in freezing weather.

When Lincoln corrected a copy of Howells' campaign biography in the summer of 1860, he left unchanged the statement: "The rude cabin of the settler was hastily erected. . . ." This was the only reference Howells made to the first Indiana house.<sup>6</sup> There is no evidence, to the writer's knowledge, that Abraham Lincoln in private conversation or public statement ever referred to living in an open

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<sup>4</sup> Abraham Lincoln, *His Speeches and Writings*, edited by Roy P. Basler (1946), p. 511. Indiana was admitted as a State on December 11, 1816.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 548.

<sup>6</sup> W. D. Howells, *Life of Abraham Lincoln* (1938, facsimile, with corrections in Lincoln's hand, of Samuel C. Parks' copy of the 1860 edition), p. 21.

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faced shack in Indiana. Lincoln was not ashamed of his humble origin, and made numerous references to the crude frontier environment of his youth. But he made no mention of a “half-faced camp.”

The first reference to a “half-faced camp” as the original Indiana shelter of the Lincoln family is in William M. Thayer’s **The Pioneer Boy, and How He Became President**, published in Boston in 1863. Thayer imaginatively recounts a conversation between the newly arrived Thomas Lincoln and one Neale, a neighbor. “Mr. Lincoln and his new friend Neale, with little Abraham, proceeded to chopping trees, and preparing the logs for the house.” Neale remarked to Lincoln: “Better build your home like mine. . . . it’s easy made and handy. There’s nothing better than a half-faced camp.” Lincoln replied, “I’d as quick have that as any; I want to get our heads covered pretty soon. In fact, that was the kind of cabin we had in Kentucky.” Neale added that “It won’t take long to do that. We can cut nearly logs enough today; and then we can put it through in a hurry.” Thayer states that “the house [was] ready to receive its tenants in two days,” although it was not then completed. “It was so far along, however, as to afford convenient shelter.” Thayer then adds a description of the house, “furnished by one who often found shelter under its room, and who lived many years close to it.” This person declared that it was

. . . sixteen by eighteen feet in size, without a floor, the logs put together at the corners by the usual method of notching them, and the cracks between them stopped with clay. It had a shed-roof, covered with slabs or clapboards split from logs. It contained but one room, except overhead slabs were laid across the logs, so as to make a chamber, to which access was had by a ladder in one corner. It had one door and one window.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Pages 88-90.

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This account by Thayer has Neale speaking of a "half-faced camp," which Thomas Lincoln is quoted as saying was "the kind of a cabin we had in Kentucky." This we know was not true. Lincoln's Knob Creek house was a full cabin. Then Thayer proceeds to describe, not a camp, but a full cabin, erected in two days by Lincoln, Abraham, Neale and (on the second day) a "Mr. Wood." This cabin had a door, a window, a loft, and a clapboard shingled roof. Obviously, this was no "half-faced camp." Thayer's informant, who had been sheltered in the cabin, and who lived for many years close by it, sounds like Dennis Hanks. The garbled nature of the reference to the half-faced camp also suggests Hanks. It is possible, however, that Thayer's information came from Nathaniel Grigsby, a neighbor, who was five years old in 1816. Grigsby's statement to Herndon on September 4, 1865, has some similarity to Thayer's description. Grigsby added a floor to the house. "His father and himself . . . built what is now called a squatter's cabin. The material was round logs or poles cut from the forest and clapboards four feet long to cover the building with, the floor consisted of what was then called puncheons, the chimney being made of sticks and clay."<sup>s</sup> Considering Grigsby's age in 1816, we can hardly accept him as an authority on the subject.

The biographies of Lincoln which appeared shortly after his death made no reference to anything but a cabin as the original Lincoln home in Indiana. Probably none of the biographers had been in contact with Dennis Hanks. Barrett (1865) states that "aided by the busy hands of his son, a log cabin was speedily built, which was to be their home through many coming years." Raymond (1865) states

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<sup>s</sup> MS., Herndon-Weik Collection, Library of Congress. Statement dated Gentryville, September 4, 1865.

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simply: "the cabin in which the family lived was built of logs. . . ." Holland (1866), records that "the emigrants met with neighborly assistance in the erection of a dwelling, and were soon housed. . . ."<sup>9</sup>

Dennis Hanks made two statements to Herndon in which he referred to the "half-faced camp." One June 8, 1865, he stated: "The first house shelter he [Thomas Lincoln] had in Indiana was a half-faced camp such as is now often seen in sugar camps."<sup>10</sup> Five days later Hanks made a more detailed statement:

We all started from Kentucky in September 1818 and was three or four days to the ferry and one day from the ferry out to the place of location. Here they stopped, camped, erected a little two-faced camp open in front, serving a momentary purpose. Lincoln saw a wild turkey near the camp on the second day after landing, and Mrs. Lincoln, Abe's good mother, loaded the gun. Abe poked the gun through the crack of the camp and accidentally killed one, which he brought to the camp house. Thomas Lincoln then went on getting trees for the logs of his house, cutting down the brush and underwood . . . . I assisted him to do this, to cut timber, haul logs, etc., and helped him erect his log cabin, a camp, one story high, just high enough to stand under, no higher. This took only one day . . . . This was in 1818. We, Lincoln's family, including Sally and Abe and myself, slept and lodged in this cabin all winter and till next spring.

Hanks then tells of the erection of the tul cabin:

In the fall and winter of 1819-1820 we commenced to cut the trees, clear out the brush and underwoods and forest for our new grand old log cabin, which we erected that winter; it was one story, eighteen by twenty feet, no passage, one window, no glass in it . . . The house was sufficiently high to make a kind of bedroom overhead, a loft.<sup>11</sup>

A close examination of this statement is revealing. Dennis Hanks did not accompany the Thomas Lincoln family

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<sup>9</sup> Joseph H. Barrett, *Life of Abraham Lincoln* (1865), p. 22; Henry J. Raymond, *The Life and Public Services of Abraham Lincoln* (1865), p. 19; J. G. Holland, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln* (1866), p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> Herndon-Weik Collection, Group IV, Library of Congress.

<sup>11</sup> Letter dated Chicago, June 13, 1865. Herndon-Weik Collection, Library of Congress. Printed in Emanuel Hertz: *The Hidden Lincoln* (1938), pp. 274-283.

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to Indiana. The move was made in December 1816, not in September 1818. Abraham Lincoln stated that he shot the turkey through a crack in "the new log cabin" a few days before his birthday anniversary in February 1817, not on the second day after arrival at the Indiana home site. Hanks refers to Thomas Lincoln's proceeding, with Hanks' assistance, to cut the logs for his house, which, when completed, was "a camp one story high." It would appear from Hanks' statement that this "camp" was the second structure, for after erecting "a little two-face camp open in front," which served a "momentary purpose," Thomas Lincoln **then** went on to getting trees for the logs of his house, which when erected in one day was also a "camp," "just high enough to stand under." Hanks' confusion also extends to the date, which he states in error was 1818. Hanks then states (now two years out of line) that in the fall and winter of 1819-1820, "our new grand old log cabin" was built, an eighteen by twenty cabin with a loft.

Hanks, in a later statement to Herndon, put the erection of the Lincoln home in the spring of 1817, when he and Thomas Sparrow helped Thomas Lincoln bring some hogs from Kentucky. Hanks and Sparrow soon returned to Kentucky. That fall Thomas and Betsy Hanks Sparrow returned to Indiana, bringing with them Mrs. Sparrow's nephew, Dennis Hanks.<sup>12</sup>

Hanks lived with the Sparrows until their death in the "milk sick" epidemic in the fall of 1818, when he moved in with the Lincolns.<sup>13</sup>

Obviously, Dennis Hanks had his chronology badly confused. The cabin he refers to as having been built in 1819-1820, probably was not a cabin for the Lincolns, but one

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<sup>12</sup> Beveridge, I, 44-45, citing Hanks' statement to Herndon dated March 12, 1866.

<sup>13</sup> Beveridge, I, 49.

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for the Sparrows, built after their arrival in the fall of 1817. Hanks naturally would have assisted in its construction. As for any structures erected by Lincoln in the winter of 1816-1817, Hanks could have had no hand in their construction, for he was in Kentucky at the time.

Hanks, then, is a very unreliable authority for any description of the original Thomas Lincoln house in Indiana. Where did he get the idea of a "half-faced camp"? Dr. Louis A. Warren suggests that Hanks may have been familiar with Thayer's 1863 account, and that it may have influenced his reminiscences.<sup>14</sup> As we have noted, Thayer may have been in touch with Hanks when collecting material for his book.

Warren's suggestion may be the correct explanation, in which case the "half-faced camp" becomes no more than a figment of the imagination. But there is another plausible explanation. Did Hanks refer to a "half-faced camp" in Indiana because he had lived in one for a short time? The following hypothesis is advanced as consistent with the known facts, although for lack of direct evidence it must remain a hypothesis.

Thomas Lincoln made a trip of exploration to Indiana to locate a new home site, probably in November 1816.<sup>15</sup> After selecting a site, he erected a half-faced camp to serve as a temporary shelter upon the arrival of his family, for he knew they would not reach the place before winter had set in. Alone on his trip, he could not erect a full cabin, but could by himself erect a camp shelter. He was in a hurry to return to Kentucky for his family, due to the lateness of the season. He did not want to take the time to erect a full

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<sup>14</sup> *Lincoln Lore*, No. 557, December 11, 1939. Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

<sup>15</sup> On November 11, 1816, Thomas Lincoln was still in Elizabethtown, Kentucky. Harry E. Pratt, *Lincoln, 1809-1839* (1941), p. 3.



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cabin with neighborhood assistance. Lincoln returned with his family, probably not later than mid-December. The family used the open-faced shelter he had prepared for them, only for as long as it took to erect a full cabin with the help of neighbors. This probably was done within a week. The family then moved from the camp to the cabin, probably not later than Christmas day, 1816. The open camp was retained as a stable. When the Sparrows arrived, in the fall of 1817, the same sequence of events took place. The Sparrows, with Dennis Hanks, used the vacant shelter for the short time required by Thomas Sparrow and Dennis Hanks, aided by Thomas Lincoln and young Abraham and other neighbors, to erect a full cabin. Thus Dennis Hanks made the acquaintance of "that Darne Little half face camp."

The half-faced camp story, then, is to Thomas Lincoln's credit rather than otherwise. He made provision for the temporary shelter of his family while his house was being built, so that they would not have to crowd in with some neighbor. He did not want to be a nuisance to his neighbors if by his own efforts he could avoid it. The Lincoln family probably lived in it less than a week. And at the most they lived in it only from the time of their arrival to a few days before February 12, 1817.

## Sarah Bush Lincoln, The Mother Who Survived Him \*

Abraham Lincoln's stepmother, Sarah Bush Lincoln, helped him along the road to greatness. Her warm heart nourished and sustained him, and her really good mind understood and protected his determined groping for knowledge during eleven formative years: from his eleventh year until he reached manhood.

Sarah Bush's family in Hardin County, Kentucky, was Colonial Dutch, the descendants of settlers at New Amsterdam.<sup>1</sup> They were prosperous and well regarded in Elizabethtown, Kentucky. At one time her father, Christopher Bush, owner over two thousand acres of land. Sarah had six brothers and two sisters, and must have had a comfortable and happy home life until her marriage to Daniel Johnston at the age of seventeen in March, 1806.

Among the friends of the Bush family was Thomas Lincoln, nearly eleven years older than Sarah. The story has been told that Thomas courted Sarah, but that he dropped out of the race when she apparently preferred Johnston. Thomas was away from Elizabethtown on a boat trip to New Orleans with her brother Isaac at the time of her marriage. Whether Thomas courted Sarah before her marriage is doubtful, but we do know that he gave her a wedding present and that a month after his return he married Nancy Hanks, an E-town girl nearer his own age. If broken, Tom's heart was soon mended.

If Sarah Bush had a choice, she picked the wrong man. Daniel Johnston was a poor provider, a man of little stand-

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\*Reprinted from the **Lincoln Herald**, Vol. 54, (Summer, 1952) pp. 13-19.

1. Information on Bush family and Sarah Bush's two marriages in **The Lincoln Kinsman**, No. 6, December 1938, "Bush Family Documents." Dr. Louis A. Warren, compiler.

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ing in the E-town community. His wife's brothers had to pay his debts on at least three occasions. The best job he ever held was that of courthouse jailer and janitor, and he only held that during the two years preceding his death in 1816. When he died leaving three children: Sarah Elizabeth, aged 8, John Davis, 6, and Matilda, 5, his estate was so small that his administrator was required to post only a bond of \$100. An E-town storekeeper jotted on Daniel Johnston's account the revealing observation: "an empty vessel makes the most noise." After his death, Sarah bought a lot in E-town with a cabin on it for \$25, and settled down to make a home and a life for her three children.

Thomas Lincoln lost his first wife, Nancy Hanks, the mother of his two children Abraham and Sarah, from the "milk sick" in October 1818. They had been living in the Pigeon Creek settlement of Spencer County, Indiana. They had come from Kentucky to this neighborhood in December 1816.

In pioneer days it was the practice for widows and widowers to remarry promptly. A pioneer family needed a man to protect them and a woman to keep the family together. So Thomas' children, Sarah, aged twelve, and Abraham, aged ten, probably waited with curiosity rather than regret, the return of their father when he went to E-town to marry and bring home to Pigeon Creek their new stepmother and her three children.

Sarah Bush Johnston was nearly 31 years old and Thomas Lincoln was 41 when the Reverend George L. Rogers, Methodist minister, married them on December 2, 1819. The marriage bond was signed by Sarah's younger brother, Christopher. She packed the good pieces of furniture she owned, including a fine walnut bureau which had cost \$40, and which probably came from the Bush home, and the

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stock of clothing owned by the family in a four-horse wagon which had been borrowed by Thomas; and they made the trip back to Pigeon Creek. At the time of her marriage she was a tall, strong woman, with pink cheeks, steady gray-blue eyes, and a very kindly expression.

Sarah was a good mother to all her children. Her Dutch orderliness soon brought comfort and cleanliness to the cabin which had lacked a woman's hand for over a year. She established a way of living that gave Abraham the time to pursue his studies when his chores were done. Sarah soon recognized that young Abraham was a cut above the other children. He, alone of the five, found books interesting. He walked miles to borrow them; and he showed an early talent for speaking — for clear statement of fact. He was a thoughtful and meditative youngster: he had the ability to reduce problems to their simplest terms. And his step-mother encouraged him, even though she could neither read nor write herself. What is more, she influenced her husband to take the same attitude towards Abraham's "book larnin'" — even to the point of doing Abraham's chores for him when he was engrossed in a book. After Abraham Lincoln's death, Mrs. Sarah Lincoln told William H. Herndon, Lincoln's law partner and biographer, that Thomas Lincoln, feeling the lack of his own education, encouraged Abraham to learn. "As a usual thing", she said, "Mr. Lincoln never made Abe quit reading to do anything if he could avoid it. He would do it himself first."<sup>2</sup>

Both Sarah Lincoln and Abraham in later years spoke of their affectionate and understanding relationship. Abraham Lincoln in 1861 told Augustus H. Chapman of Charleston (who married Sarah's granddaughter Harriet

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<sup>2</sup> Statement of September 8, 1865. Herndon-Weik Mss., photostats in Illinois State Historical Library, Nos. 335-342.

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Hanks) that she had always encouraged him in his studies and declared that, "she had been his best friend in this world and that no son could love a mother more than he loved her."<sup>3</sup> Sarah told Herndon in 1865 that "Abe was a good boy, and I can say what scarcely one woman, and mother can say in a thousand . . . . Abe never gave me a cross word or look and never refused in fact, or even in appearance, to do anything I requested him. I never gave him a cross word in all my life . . . . His mind and mine, what little I had, seemed to run together — move in the same channel."<sup>4</sup>

Abraham Lincoln's Pigeon Creek home was humble, but there was affectionate family life, mutual trust, and consideration. At every meal Thomas asked this blessing: "Fit and prepare us for humble service. We beg for Christ's sake, Amen."<sup>5</sup> It is difficult to see how Abraham Lincoln's later career could have materialized had he not had this bedrock of congenial and sympathetic life as a boy. As one writer put it: Abraham Lincoln was "step-mothered to greatness."<sup>6</sup> Sarah Lincoln, more than any other one person who influenced Abraham Lincoln's youth, deserves the thanks of a nation.

When Abraham reached his twenty-first birthday, Thomas decided to move to Illinois. Abraham's sister Sarah had died in childbirth two years before following her marriage to Aaron Grigsby. There was a recurrence of the "milk-sick" in the neighborhood which was killing cattle and humans. Thomas had heard tales of the fertile Illinois land. So he tried Macon County in Illinois for a year, but

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3. The same, No. 442.

4. The same, Nos. 335-342.

5. Sandburg: *Lincoln Collector*, pp. 107-108.

6. Thomas J. Malone, "Stepmothered to Greatness," in *American Legion Magazine*, February 1939, p. 3.

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malaria and the terrible winter of the "deep snow" (1830-1831) discouraged him. In May 1831, the Thomas Lincoln family was on its way back to Indiana when friends persuaded them to try Coles County for a while. Hannah Radley, sister of Sarah Lincoln, lived here.

Abraham Lincoln was no longer living with his parents in 1831. He was twenty-two years old, and had started to work out his own destiny — first at New Salem (to 1837) and then at Springfield. He never lived in Coles County, but he visited his folks there many times, the first time in July 1831 and the last time in January 1861.

Mrs. Lincoln was nearly forty-three years old when she first came to Coles County, and she was nearly fifty-two when she and her husband moved in 1840 to their fifth Coles County home at Goosenest Prairie — now the Lincoln Log Cabin State Park. There she lived for twenty-nine years, dying there in her eighty-first year in 1869.

Harriet Hanks Chapman, a granddaughter, has given us a description of the Sarah Lincoln of Coles County. Mrs. Chapman (the daughter of Sarah Elizabeth Johnston Hanks and Dennis Hanks) was fourteen years old in 1840. In 1865 she told Herndon that Mrs. Lincoln was "a very tall woman, straight as an Indian, of fair complexion, and was — when I first remember her — very handsome, sprightly, talkative, and proud. She wore her hair curled till gray, is kindhearted and very charitable, and also very industrious."<sup>7</sup>

Abraham's visits to his folks at Goosenest Prairie were most numerous during the 1840's when he was an active circuit riding lawyer and attended court at Charleston, the Coles County seat, once or twice a year. On most of these court visits he took the time to visit his father and step-

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7. December 17, 1865. Herndon-Weik photostats, Nos. 458-459.

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mother. Often he would hire a buggy for the trip. We may picture him on the seven-mile drive to his father's cabin, the floor at his feet piled with gifts: a sack of flour, a bag of sugar, a bag of coffee beans, perhaps a ham or side of bacon (for Thomas probably had no smoke house), and a few bags of rock candy for the children of John D. Johnston, his stepbrother, who with his family lived with Thomas and Sarah. It will not stretch the imagination to include a bolt of calico for Sarah and perhaps a bright shawl or "comforter" for the old lady.

What happiness for Sarah to have this man take time out of his busy life to come to see her! With his respect for her intelligence, he may have talked over some of his problems with her.

Throughout his life in Springfield and Washington, Abraham Lincoln kept the welfare of Sarah in mind, and made frequent provisions for her comfort. While his father was living, Abraham's financial assistance was not needed very often. Thomas Lincoln though not wealthy, was a responsible citizen and a hard worker. In 1840 Abraham gave his folks \$200 for forty acres of their farm, primarily to keep it out of the hands of his indolent stepbrother, John D. Johnston, and to insure that they would always have a home. Thomas and Sarah retained a life interest in the use of the property. After the death of Thomas in 1851, Abraham refused to sell this "Abraham forty" (as it is known today) and to give part of the sale price to Johnston. His letter, dated November 25, 1851, to his stepbrother gives us an understanding of his attitude toward his stepmother:

Dear Brother:

Your letter of the 22nd is just received. Your proposal about selling the east forty acres of land is all that I want or could claim for myself; but I am not satisfied with it on mother's account. I



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want her to have her living, and I feel that it is my duty, to some extent to see that she is not wronged. She had a right of dower (that is, the use of one-third for life) in the other two forties; but, it seems, she has already let you take that, hook and line. She now has the use of the whole of the east forty as long as she lives; and if it be sold, of course she is entitled to the interest on **all** the money it brings as long as she lives; but you propose to sell it for three hundred dollars, take one hundred away with you, and leave her two hundred dollars at 8 per cent, making her the **enormous** sum of 16 dollars a year. Now, if you are satisfied with treating her that way, I am not. It is true, that you are to have that forty for two hundred dollars, **at** mother's death; but you are not to have it **before**. I am confident that land can be made to produce for mother at least \$30 a year, and I can not, to oblige any living person, consent that she shall be put on an allowance of sixteen dollars a year.\*

Actually the forty acres were never sold by Abraham. The land eventually went to Mrs. Lincoln's grandson, John Johnston Hall, with whom she made her home most of the time until her death in 1869.

After his father's death Abraham sent his stepmother money at frequent intervals. There is a tradition in the Sawyer family, with whom Mrs. Lincoln spent some time following her husband's death, that Abraham sent her ten dollars a month. On one occasion she purchased a shawl and a breast-pin as gifts for the daughters of her niece, Mrs. John Sawyer (the daughter of her sister Hannah Radley). When Abraham was in Charleston for the debate with Douglas in 1858, he gave his mother fifty dollars, according to Chapman. On the occasion of his last visit to her, in January 1861, the biographer Jesse Weik states that he left her "a generous sum of money to lighten the burden of her declining years and thus insure her every comfort."<sup>9</sup>

President Lincoln did not forget his Coles County mother when he was in Washington. He undoubtedly sent her

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8. Nicolay and Hay: **Complete Works**, vol. II, pp. 152-153.

9. Weik: **The Real Lincoln**, p. 50.

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money on occasions of which we have no record, but one recorded instance was in March 1864, when he sent her fifty dollars, in care of her son-in-law, Dennis Hanks. Hanks reported to Lincoln: "Dere Abe I received your Letter Check for 50.00. I shoed it to Mother. She cried like a child."<sup>10</sup>

Evidently the question of taking care of Mrs. Lincoln was a point of contention between Dennis Hanks and John J. Hall, her grandson. Each criticised the other to Lincoln. On October 18, 1864, Hall wrote to Lincoln that Sarah was not receiving the money he sent her. Hanks and Chapman, according to Hall, were keeping the money. Hall wrote:

Dear Uncle,

This leaves us all well but Grand Mother. She is quite puny. I write to inform you that Grand Mother has not and does not receive one cent of the money you send her Dennis & Chapman keep all the money you send her. She now needs clothing and shoes. They have the money in their Pockett & Uncle Dennis is cussing you all the time and abusing me & your best friends for supporting you they make you believe they are taking care of her which is not the case. I & my mother are now taking care of her and have for the past four years. If you wish for her to have anything send it by check here to the bank of Charleston, or send none for I tell you upon the honor of a man she does not get it & he Dennis has threatened to put her on the county. . . . I remain your nephew.

John J. Hall

N. B. I have written you these plain truths by Gran Mothers request She has been asking me to do this for four years — please write soon<sup>11</sup>

How unfortunate that President Lincoln in the midst of the problems and miseries of the war was bothered by this bickering among his stepmother's relatives.

Mrs. Lincoln was living with the Halls at the Goosenest Prairie farm at the time of Lincoln's assassination. Dennis

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10. Robert Todd Lincoln Collection, Library of Congress. No. 32134.

11. The same, No. 37368.

## SARAH BUSH LINCOLN

Hanks recalled in 1889 that he brought her the sad news. "‘Aunt Sairy,’ sez I, ‘Abe’s dead.’ ‘Yes, I know Denny. I knowed they’d kill him. I ben awaitin’ fur it,’ and she never asked no questions. She was getting purty old, an’ I reckon she thought she’d like to jine him.”<sup>12</sup> Hanks did not mention the presence of Hall, who later gave his own account of the same incident. He remembered that when she got the news of Abraham’s death “she jest put her aperm over her face and cried out ‘Oh my boy Abe; They’ve killed him I knowed they would. I knowed they would.’ She never had no heart after that to be chirp and peart like she used to be.”<sup>13</sup>

In September 1865 Herndon interviewed Mrs. Lincoln. She told him: “I did not want Abe to run for President, did not want him elected, was afraid somehow or other, felt it in my heart that something would happen to him . . . Abe and his father are in Heaven, I have no doubt, and I want to go to them, go where they are. God bless Abraham.”<sup>14</sup>

Mrs. Lincoln’s health was poor during the last few years of her life. In January 1867, Harriet Chapman reported to Herndon that “Grandma is getting very feeble. Since I wrote last [a month earlier] I have visited her and found her quite sick.”<sup>15</sup>

Abraham Lincoln’s wife and stepmother never met. But a letter to Sarah Lincoln from Mary Todd Lincoln on December 19, 1867, shows that she fully realized her husband’s affection for his stepmother. The letter accompanied gifts the younger Mrs. Lincoln was sending to her mother-in-law. She wrote:

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12. Atkinson: *The Boyhood of Lincoln*, pp. 54-55.

13. Gridley: *The Story of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 279.

14. Herndon-Weik Mss., Library of Congress. Group IV, No. 2315.

15. Herndon-Weik photostats, No. 1363.

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Mrs. Sally Lincoln

My dear Madam:

In memory of the dearly beloved one, who always remembered you with so much affection, will you not do me the favor of accepting these few trifles? God has been very merciful to you, in prolonging your life and I trust your health has also been preserved — In my great agony of mind I can not trust myself to write about, what so entirely fills my thoughts, my darling husband; knowing how well you loved him also, is a grateful satisfaction to me. Believe me, dear madam, if I can ever be of any service to you in any respect, I am entirely at your service. . . . I will be pleased to learn whether this package was received by you. Perhaps you know that our youngest boy is named for your husband, Thomas Lincoln, this child, the idol of his father — I am blessed in both my sons, they are very good and noble. The oldest is growing very much like his own dear father, I am a deeply afflicted woman, and hope you will pray for me.

I am, my dear Madam affectionately yours Mary Lincoln<sup>16</sup>

Sarah Lincoln died on April 10, 1869<sup>17</sup> at the old Lincoln farm at Goosenest Prairie, where she had been living with the Halls. She was buried, according to Hall, in a black woolen dress which Abraham had given to her on his last visit to Coles County in 1861.<sup>18</sup> The minister was the Reverend Aaron Lovins of Toledo, Illinois, who had been preaching at the Webster School, a mile and half south of the Lincoln farm, where Mrs. Lincoln and the Halls had attended services. Mr. Lovins was a member of the Disciples of Christ.<sup>19</sup> There was a great crowd at the funeral—the largest ever held in the neighborhood according to a later newspaper account. The minister stood at the door of the cabin, with the family seated inside and the neighbors

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16. Photostat in possession of the writer. Original in files of the Lincoln National Life Foundation, Fort Wayne, Indiana. Also in *Lincoln Lore*, No. 526. Courtesy of Dr. Louis A. Warren.

17. Herndon's *Lincoln* (1930 edition), p. 30. Barton: *The Women Lincoln Loved*, p. 108. and Harbel: *The Life of Abraham Lincoln*, Vol. III, p. 26 (picture caption), gives the date of her death as December 10, 1869. The county death records of Coles County do not go back to 1869.

18. Gridley; *The Story of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 277.

19. Lerna (Illinois) *Weekly Eagle*, April 17, 1931.

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standing outside.<sup>20</sup> She was buried by the side of her husband in the Shiloh cemetery.

Perhaps the finest compliment paid to Sarah Lincoln by the biographers of her son comes from William E. Barton, who in his **The Women Lincoln Loved**, wrote: "Year in and year out, through the period of his late boyhood and young manhood, Abraham Lincoln saw and admired and loved this handsome, curly-haired new mother of his, and he carried into life a finer ideal of womanhood for what he discovered in her."<sup>21</sup>

Sarah Lincoln deserves to be remembered and honored. Where she could have brought bitterness and futility into the life of Abraham Lincoln, she brought affection and inspiration. The quality of warm human kindness so marked in Abraham's character was a reflection in part at least of his happy home life as a boy after Sarah became his step-mother. The affectionate relationship between Sarah and her adopted family was due to her own motherly affection, shared without difference or distinction with the son of Thomas and her own children. Let us honor Sarah Lincoln, a worthy mother to Nancy Lincoln's boy.

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20. Clipping, no date, probably February 1892. Photostat from Abraham Lincoln Association, Springfield, Illinois.

21. Barton: **The Women Lincoln Loved**, p. 91.

## The Matson Slave Case\*

The most dramatic and controversial case in which Abraham Lincoln appeared as an attorney in the Coles County Circuit Court was the "Matson slave case," in October 1847.<sup>1</sup>

The case involved the freedom of a negro woman, Jane Bryant, and her four children: Mary Catherine, Sally Ann, Mary Jane, and Robert Noah. Anthony Bryant her husband was a free negro employed as the farm foreman of Robert Matson of Kentucky. For some years Matson had farmed land two miles east of Newman in what is today Douglas County (created 1859) but was then in Coles County. Since 1843 Matson had brought slaves from Kentucky to his "Black Grove" farm<sup>2</sup> for the farm work each spring, returning them to Kentucky in the fall. Matson claimed that the slaves were not Illinois residents, and hence were not entitled to their freedom. Bryant, his year-around foreman, became free because of his permanent residence in Illinois, although it seems he did not receive a "certificate of freedom," as required by Illinois law.

Bryant's wife Jane, with her four children, was among the slaves brought by Matson to Black Grove in the spring of 1847. When the time approached for their return to Kentucky in the fall of 1847, Bryant took his wife and the four children to nearby Oakland and placed them under

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\*Reprinted from *Abraham Lincoln and Coles County*, pp. 104-111.

<sup>1</sup> Circuit Court Record, vol. II, pp. 191, 196; Herndon-Weik microfilm, group III, Nos. 1950-1974; O. B. Ficklin: "A Pioneer Lawyer," in *The Tuscola Review* (Tuscola, Ill.), Sept. 7, 1922 (reprinted from a Charleston, Ill. paper, January 15, 1885); Duncan T. McIntyre: "Lincoln and the Matson Slave Case," in *Illinois Law Review*, January 1907, pp. 386-391; Jesse W. Weik: "Lincoln and the Matson Negroes." "A Vista into the Fugitive Slave Days," *The Arena*, April 1897, pp. 752-758; Beveridge, vol. I, pp. 392-397; Sandburg, vol. I, pp. 330-335; Tarbell, pp. 258-260; Woldman, pp. 59-64.

<sup>2</sup> Entered by Robert Matson, Aug. 3, 1842. W $\frac{1}{2}$ , NW $\frac{1}{4}$ , Sect. 33, T. 16 N., R. 14 W. of the 2nd Principal Meridian.

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the protection of two Coles County abolitionists, Gideon Mathew Ashmore, local tavern proprietor, and Dr. Hiram Rutherford, to prevent their being returned to Kentucky.<sup>3</sup> Ashmore gave shelter to Jane and her children.

Matson made affidavit that the negroes sheltered by Ashmore were his slaves. After a hearing of two days before Justice of the Peace William Gilman, the five negroes were lodged in the Coles County jail in the custody of Sheriff Lewis R. Hutchason. They were in Illinois without "letters of freedom," and under the law they must be kept, advertised, and their labor sold to pay for their keep. After holding the negroes for forty-eight days the sheriff filed a claim against Matson for \$107.30 for "keeping and dieting five negroes at thirty-seven cents each per day." The next step in the case came on October 16, 1847, when Ashmore, through his attorney, Orlando B. Ficklin, applied to the Circuit Court for the release of the negroes on a writ of **habeas corpus**.<sup>4</sup> In retaliation, Matson sued both Rutherford and Ashmore for \$2,500 for having taken his slaves from him.

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<sup>3</sup> Dr. Rutherford came to Coles County from Pennsylvania in December 1840. He was Robert Matson's physician during the period 1842-1843, as noted in the doctor's account book in the possession of his granddaughter, Mrs. Elizabeth Rutherford Zimmerman of Oakland, Illinois. Ashmore came from Tennessee. According to Orlando B. Ficklin, in an account first published on January 15, 1885, in the summer of 1847, while Matson was absent in Kentucky, his housekeeper at the Black Grove farm, Mary Corbin, in a fit of anger told Sim Wilmot, brother of Jane Bryant and also a slave, that when Matson returned it was his intention to return the Negroes to Kentucky and sell them. Sim told his sister and her husband, who appealed to Ashmore for help after being refused assistance by two nearby church groups. Ashmore called in Dr. Rutherford. According to Ficklin, Ashmore and Rutherford were among "the most thorough-faced abolitionists of that day." Ficklin wrote that there were thirty-three abolitionists in Coles County in 1847. In addition to Rutherford and the Ashmore brothers, Gideon Mathew and Samuel Claiborn, in the Oakland neighborhood, Ficklin mentioned a group in the Goosenest Prairie neighborhood, including members of the Rodgers, Balch, Campbell and Dryden families. They were "men of pluck and of the Cromwellian mold; sober, quiet, industrious citizens. They were lampooned and derided for not being either Clay Whigs or Jackson Democrats." In *Tuscola* (Illinois) *Review*, September 7, 1922. Courtesy of Dr. C. W. Rutherford, Indianapolis, Indiana.

<sup>4</sup> Petition in Herndon-Weik microfilm, group III. Nos. 1953-1955.



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Lincoln entered the case at this point. The October term of court had arrived and he was present with other circuit-riding lawyers. Chief Justice William Wilson of the state Supreme Court, judge of the Fourth Circuit, presided, assisted by Justice Samuel H. Treat of that Court, judge of the Eighth Circuit. A Supreme Court justice was not on the Coles County bench because of the importance of the case; Supreme Court justices at this time performed circuit duty. The presence of Justice Treat, regularly assigned to an adjoining circuit, however, was indicative of the interest aroused by the case. He was present at the invitation of Justice Wilson, according to Ficklin.

Usher F. Linder, Matson's attorney, requested Lincoln to assist him in the suit against Rutherford, and Lincoln attested the bond for costs provided by the friends of Matson.<sup>5</sup> Dr. Rutherford, who knew Lincoln, also wished to secure his legal services. Rutherford came to Charleston from Oakland for that purpose. Rutherford later recounted the story of his interview with Lincoln:

I found him at the tavern sitting on the veranda, his chair tilted back against one of the wooden pillars entertaining the bystanders and loungers gathered about the place with one of his . . . stories. My head was full of the impending lawsuit and I found it a great test my patience to await the end of the chapter. . . . Before he could begin another I interrupted and called him aside.

I told him in detail the story of my troubles, reminded him that we had always agreed on the questions of the day, and asked him to represent me at the trial of my case in court. He listened attentively

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<sup>5</sup> Beveridge, vol. I, p. 394. According to McIntyre, Matson had gone to Springfield (shortly after the negroes had fled to Ashmore's tavern) and had consulted Lincoln. A few days after his return from Springfield Matson stated "that he did not know where this thing — meaning his effort to take the negroes back to Kentucky — would end, that he had been to Springfield to consult Abraham Lincoln; that he did not quite like the way he talked about slavery, still as he wanted the best lawyer in the country he had retained him for any litigation he might get into." Matson notified Lincoln to attend the October term of court at Charleston. McIntyre, pp. 387-390. Document No. 1951 in the Herndon-Weik microfilm shows that Thomas A. Marshall of Charleston was associated with Linder and Lincoln in Matson's behalf.

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. . . but I noticed a peculiarly troubled look came over his face now and then, his eyes appeared fixed in the distance beyond me and he shook his head several times as if debating with himself some question of grave import.

Reluctantly, Lincoln told Rutherford that he could not represent him, as he had already been counseled with in Matson's behalf, which placed him under a professional obligation. Rutherford, irritated at Lincoln's refusal, engaged the services of Charles H. Constable. In the meantime Lincoln secured a release in the case, presumably from Linder, and offered to represent Rutherford. But Rutherford had already engaged Constable, so Lincoln continued as Linder's associate in Matson's interest.<sup>6</sup>

The whole litigation — Matson's damage suit, the sheriff's bill, and the freedom of the five negroes — turned upon the outcome of the **habeas corpus** proceedings. Ficklin, Ashmore's counsel, realized that Matson would strengthen his claim to the negroes if he bid them in when their services were put up for sale for the jail charges, and secured a court order stopping the sale until the **habeas corpus** proceedings had been adjudicated. The case came up on October 16, 1847, the day the petition was made to the court.

The case hinged on the question, were the negroes held "in transit" while crossing the state, or were they held in the state by the will of their master? If only crossing the state they were not free, but if located in the state by the will of their master, they were. The question, therefore, was the "true intent and meaning" of Matson in placing his Kentucky slaves on his Black Grove farm. The only evidence that the stay of the negroes on Matson's farm was temporary came from Joseph Dean, Matson's hired man, an "ignorant, worthless fellow," according to Ficklin.

Linder, speaking for Matson, argued that the recognition

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<sup>6</sup> Beveridge, vol. I, pp. 394-395.

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of slavery by the federal Constitution created an obligation to protect slave property wherever the Constitution applied. Ficklin commented in later years that Linder's speech, because of the eloquence and boldness with which he defended Matson's claim to the negroes, "would have been vociferously cheered" in South Carolina. Linder, showing "bitter and malignant prejudice" toward abolitionists, bitterly denounced Ashmore and Rutherford for harboring runaway slaves.

Ficklin and Constable contended that the Ordinance of 1787 and the Constitution of Illinois (1818) outlawed slavery in Illinois. Constable quoted effectively from the famous speech of Curran in defense of Rowan, a defense which made Lincoln wince, according to Ficklin.

I speak in the spirit of the British law, which makes liberty commensurate with and inseparable from British soil; which proclaims even to the stranger and sojourner the moment he sets foot upon British earth, that the ground on which he treads is holy and consecrated by the genius of universal emancipation, no matter what complexion incomparable with freedom an Indian or African sun may have burnt upon him, no matter in what disastrous battle his liberty may have been cloven down; no matter with what solemnities he may have been devoted upon the altar of slavery; the first moment he touches the sacred soil of Britain the altar and the god sink together in the dust; his soul walks abroad in her own majesty; his body swells beyond the measure of his chains that burst from around him and he stands regenerated and disenthralled by the irresistible genius of universal emancipation.<sup>7</sup>

Lincoln, speaking for Matson, did not endorse the position taken by Linder, but admitted that if the Matson negroes had been permanently located by their master in Illinois, such action made them free. Ficklin observed that Lincoln, as was his habit, stated

his opponents' points and arguments with such amplitude and seeming fairness and such liberality of concession of their force

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<sup>7</sup> Beveridge, vol. I, p. 397n. Quotation from *Tuscola Review*, September 7, 1922.

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and strength that it increased in his adversaries their confidence of success. This was done in this case, but his trenchant blows and cold logic and subtle knitting together and presentations of facts favorable to his side of the case, soon dissipated all hope that any advantage was likely to be gained by Lincoln's liberal concession, but rather that he had gained from the court a more patient and favorable hearing and consideration of the facts on which he relied for success. The fact that General Matson had at such a time when he placed a slave on his Illinois farm, publicly declared that he was not placed there for permanent settlement, and that no counter statement had ever been made publicly or privately by him, constituted the web and woof of the argument of Mr. Lincoln, and these facts were plausibly, ingeniously and forcibly presented to the court, so as to give them all the effect and significance to which they were entitled and more.<sup>8</sup>

Beveridge found that those present felt that Lincoln argued weakly, and that his speech was fatal to his client's case.<sup>9</sup>

The decision was in favor of the negroes. The court record shows the disposition of the case:

In the matter of the petition of Jane Bryant, Mary Jane Bryant, Mary Catherine Bryant, Sally Ann Bryant and Robert Noah Bryant, Persons of Color, on application by **Habeas Corpus** for freedom,

Now at this day come the said applicants and presented by Gideon M. Ashmore their petition for the writ of **Habeas Corpus** directed to Lewis R. Hutchason, Esqr. Sheriff of Coles County who held them in custody, and this court being satisfied in the premises, ordered the said writ to issue, returnable forthwith before his Honor Chief Justice Wilson assisted by the Honorable Samuel H. Treat Associate Justice of the Supreme Court; and the said writ having been returned, and the said Lewis R. Hutchason having returned upon the said writ the causes of capture and detention together with the said Negroes into court, and the cause coming on to be heard after testimony adduced and argument had and the court being satisfied what judgment to render, it is finally considered and adjudged that the said Applicants Jane Bryant, Mary Jane Bryant, Mary Catherine Bryant, Sally Ann Bryant, and Robert Noah Bryant be discharged from the custody as well of the said Lewis R. Hutchason as of Robert Matson and all persons claiming them by through and under him as slaves, and they be and remain free and

<sup>8</sup> *Tuscola Review*, Sept. 7, 1922.

<sup>9</sup> Beveridge, vol. I, p. 396.

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discharged from all servitude whatever to any person or persons from henceforth and forever. It is further adjudged that this proceeding be certified to said Negroes, as evidence of their freedom. And the Sheriff, Lewis R. Hutchason having returned that said Negroes were retained by him upon proceedings instituted by the said Robert Matson as owner of said Negroes, it is further ordered that the said Robert Matson pay all costs due and owing by reason of the original arrest of said Negroes including the costs of this application and that execution issue from this court therefore etc.<sup>10</sup>

In brief, Matson lost his slaves and was charged with all costs involved in their arrest and detention in jail. Although his client lost, it is reasonable to assume that Lincoln rejoiced in the outcome — “that they be and remain free . . . from henceforth and forever.” No wonder that Paul M. Angle has called this case “one of the strangest episodes in Lincoln’s career at the bar.”<sup>11</sup>

On October 17, the day following the issuance of the writ of *habeas corpus*, Rutherford and Ashmore signed a bond for \$1,000 in behalf of the freed negroes.<sup>12</sup> This was necessary to insure their continued liberty, under the “Black Laws” of Illinois.

When the decision was announced, according to Rutherford, Matson hurriedly left for Kentucky, evaded his creditors, and never paid Lincoln his fee.<sup>13</sup>

The next spring, while Lincoln was in Washington, Matson’s suit against Ashmore was disposed of. The court dismissed the case and ordered that Ashmore recover his costs

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<sup>10</sup> Circuit Court Record, vol. II, p. 191. The order was dated October 16, 1847.

<sup>11</sup> Whitney, Circuit, p. 315n. Note by the editor.

<sup>12</sup> Herndon-Weik microfilm, group III, No. 1958.

<sup>13</sup> Beveridge, vol. I, p. 397. Matson may have given Lincoln a note for some amount over twenty dollars, which Lincoln gave to his father. On December 7, 1848, Thomas Lincoln wrote to his son that the note from “Robert Mattison I tried to sell it for 15\$ in cash and couldnt doe it so James M Miller offered John [D. Johnston] twenty dollars in goods at his trade prices & Monroe advised him to take it, so he sold it to him with out recourse on any body. . . .” Photostat from Huntington Library, San Marino, California. The letter is in the handwriting of John D. Johnston.

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from Matson.<sup>14</sup> Probably Ashmore never received a penny from the absent Matson.

A week after the negroes were liberated, Dr. Rutherford described the case in a letter to his brother-in-law in Pennsylvania.

Our Circuit Court sat last week. I had the pleasure of attending as a party to give reasons why Justice should **not** be done. I was sued by a person named Matson for the gentlemanly sum of twenty-five hundred dollars & 50 dol damage. The suit did not come on. My attorney submitted a plea of dismissal which was not decided and so it stands until May next.

The circumstances of this suit arose from the following occurrences. About 2 years ago Matson brought with him from Kentucky a free man and his wife & five children who were his slaves there, to this country and settled them on his farm 12 miles distant from this place. He suffered them to remain with him till last summer, when he determined to remove the children to his residence in Kentucky, and leave the old people childless in Illinois. He had previously taken back one child and then resolved to remove the remaining 4. The parents to avoid force left his farm with their children, and came to this place, and put themselves under the protection of a man named Ashmore. Matson got out a process to take them as runaways, and the woman and children were brought before a court of 3 justices. A number of us feeling an interest in the case employed the Hon. O. B. Ficklin M.C. of this county to defend them. The court decided to commit them to jail as runaways, as it was concluded to try the case before the circuit Judge at the Oct. term. Matson sued Ashmore and myself for harboring them (the fine for which is \$500 each person by law). However the negro trial came on, and the arguments were heard by two of our circuit judges, who ordered them to be discharged from the custody of the sheriff and Matson pay the costs, amounting to \$200. Matson left the next day for Kentucky without his blacks and whether he will return to attend to the suits against Mr. Ashmore and myself in May is uncertain. Be it as may I feel no uneasiness as I did not have them on my premises and besides I expect to get rid of the suit from a defect in the declaration.<sup>15</sup>

A few weeks after the Matson case, when both Lincoln and Ficklin were in Washington for the first session of the

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<sup>14</sup> Circuit Court Record, vol. II, p. 196. May 9, 1848.

<sup>15</sup> Letter from Dr. Hiram Rutherford, Oakland, Ill., to John J. Bowman, Elizabethville, Pa., Oct. 25, 1847. In possession of a grandson of Dr. Rutherford, Mr. Hiram John Rutherford, Oakland, Ill. Courtesy of Mr. Rutherford.

## MATSON SLAVE CASE

Congress to which they had been elected, Lincoln remarked to Ficklin, when speaking of the Matson case: "Ficklin do you know that I think the latter part of your speech was as eloquent as I ever listened to?" Ficklin prized this remark "because of its rarity, for Lincoln seldom paid compliments in the presence of the person complimented — the rule was otherwise with him."<sup>16</sup>

The liberated Bryant family, Anthony, his wife and the four children, was given passage to Liberia by wellwishers in Illinois and Missouri. One of the donors was William H. Herndon, Lincoln's law partner in Springfield. An investigator for the Colored Baptist Association of Illinois, Elder S. S. Ball of Springfield, saw them at Monrovia, Liberia, in the spring of 1848. In his report Ball stated that the Bryants had arrived in Liberia without funds and were living under deplorable conditions. Anthony asked Ball that money be provided to return the family to the United States. This was not done.<sup>17</sup>

The Illinois "Black Laws," which sought to discourage the presence of negroes in Illinois, were not repealed until 1865.<sup>18</sup> As late as September 1864, a Coles County grand jury indicted one William Cash for bringing a slave, a mulatto girl named Adell, into the State of Illinois for the purpose of setting her free. When the case came before Circuit Judge Oliver L. Davis on April 4, 1865, he threw it out, and "ordered that this cause be stricken from the docket and defendant discharged."<sup>19</sup>

Why did Lincoln appear as an attorney for a slave owner who was claiming slaves in the free State of Illinois? The

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<sup>16</sup> *The Tuscola Review*, Sept. 7, 1922.

<sup>17</sup> Paul M. Angle: "Aftermath of the Matson Slave Case," in *Abraham Lincoln Quarterly*, vol. II, pp. 146-149 (September 1944).

<sup>18</sup> Act approved Feb. 7, 1865. *Public Laws of Illinois*, 1865, p. 105.

<sup>19</sup> Circuit Court Record, vol. IX, p. 150. The indictment is on file in the lower vault of the Circuit Clerk's office.



## MATSON SLAVE CASE

answer may be seen in his sense of professional obligation. He had advised Usher F. Linder, Matson's lawyer, and felt obliged not to appear as counsel for Matson's opponent. J. G. Holland, writing in 1865, pointed out in his brief description of this case, that Lincoln recognized slaves as property. If he had not, he "would never have consented to act on this case . . ." In other words, although Lincoln disliked slavery, he knew that it was recognized by the Constitution, and that a slave owner was entitled to have his claim properly adjudicated, even in a free state. Holland noted, also, that Lincoln "made a very poor plea . . . and that all of his sympathies were on the side of the slaves."<sup>20</sup> This leaves the question, why did Lincoln appear in the case at all? The writer believes that Lincoln looked upon his participation in the case as a matter of professional obligation only. He argued only the technicalities involved. Lincoln did not attempt to justify Matson's claim on any basis of equity or justice.

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<sup>20</sup> Holland, p. 121.

# The Use of the Term "Copperhead" During the Civil War\*

The expression "Copperhead" as a term of opprobrium for Peace Democrats came into general use in the North during the fall and winter of 1862. A number of students of the period have endeavored to locate the first use of the term. James F. Rhodes, in his monumental **History** found the term in the **Cincinnati Commercial** for October 1, 1862.<sup>1</sup> Albert Matthews reported the September 24 issue of the **Chicago Tribune**,<sup>2</sup> and Paul S. Smith reported the **Cincinnati Gazette** for July 30, 1862.<sup>3</sup> John B. McMaster, in his **History of the People of the United States During Lincoln's Administration**, located a use of the term in the **Cincinnati Commercial** for August 17, 1861, over eleven months earlier than Smith's citation.<sup>4</sup> In this August, 1861 issue of the **Commercial**, "A Jackson Democrat" suggests, in a letter to the editor, that the term "Copper Heads" be applied to the Peace Democrats of Ohio, and that their motto be, "Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life" (**Genesis** 3:14).

Three additional uses of the term by the **Commercial** which are earlier than the one cited by Rhodes have been noted. An editorial on September 4, 1861, headed "The Trail of the Serpent of Conspiracy," refers to the "northern tools of the political Brahmins of the South" as being "like copperheads and rattlesnakes in winter, cold in their stiff

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\* Reprinted from the **Mississippi Valley Historical Review**, Vol. 25, (June, 1938 - March, 1939), pp. 263-264.

<sup>1</sup> **History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850** (New York, 1904), IV, 224-225.

<sup>2</sup> See **Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts** (Boston), XX (1917), 207; also letters of Matthews to editor of **Nation** (New York), CVI (1918), 758.

<sup>3</sup> **American Historical Review** (New York), XXXII (1927), 799.

<sup>4</sup> (New York, 1927), 167.

## USE OF TERM "COPPERHEAD"

and silent coils" when the patriots of the North rallied to the cause of the Union. An editorial on May 15, 1862, referred to "the Copper Heads, as the blind and venomous enemies of our Government found in our midst."<sup>5</sup> On July 7, 1862, the **Commercial**, in reviewing a speech by Clement L. Vallandigham, wrote that in his speech "the forked tongue of the copper head appeared."

All of the above uses of the term "copperhead" appeared in newspapers published in the Middle West, where the expression seems to have gained its greatest popularity. An even earlier use of the term, coming from Maryland, has been located. The **New York Tribune** for July 20, 1861, contains the following in its Baltimore correspondence, dated July eighteenth: "The 'Copper-Heads' are very irritable, and are growling savagely at the late successes of Major General McClellan." Here the term is clearly one of reproach for Confederate sympathizers in Maryland. The use of the quotation marks indicates that its use was not yet common.

Whether or not there is any connection between this use of "Copper-Heads" in Maryland, in July, 1861, and the suggestion of "Copper Heads" as a name for Ohio Peace Democrats one month later, remains a matter of speculation. The location of additional uses of the term, between July 20 and August 17, 1861, might throw some light on this point.

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<sup>5</sup> The author of this note is indebted to Mr. E. Kidd Lockard, fellow in history at Western Reserve University, for locating and supplying the citations from the **Cincinnati Commercial** for August 17, September 4, 1861, and May 15, 1862.

# The Election of 1868

## “DEMOCRATIC DESPONDENCY: THE VOTES ARE CAST”\*

In some Democratic circles the failure to make a better showing in the “October States” created so much of a panic that a last minute change of candidates was at once proposed. While this suggestion occurred to various leaders, the proposal by the *World* on October 15 received the greatest attention. There is evidence that the friends of President Johnson and Chief Justice Chase looked with some favor upon the proposed change in candidates, as possibly giving to them at the last minute the chance they failed to receive in the Democratic National Convention.

An early intimation that Democratic failure in the October elections might call for drastic action was mentioned by Francis P. Blair, Sr., on October 8. The veteran wrote to Senator Doolittle, “Whatever the results next Tuesday may bring, our friends most deeply concerned in their personal and political destinies must, they think, have counsel from the North. I am desired to invoke our wisest and most trusted friends to come to Washington and consult of the course then to be taken. Pray come to my son’s [Montgomery’s] house on the 17th instant. I write other notes to bring together a council of friends who will say nothing of the contemplated meeting.”<sup>1</sup>

One explanation of the meeting is suggested by a letter from Blair, Sr., to Tilden on October 19, in which he says that the movement to change the ticket was entered into by Seward and Chase to replace Seymour by Chase. Some rumour of this was perhaps in the air as early as October 8,

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\*Reprinted from *The Election of 1868: The Democratic Effort to Regain Control*, (Columbia University Press, New York, 1933), pp. 344-367.

<sup>1</sup> J. R. Doolittle Papers, Library of Congress, 1860-1887.

## THE ELECTION OF 1868

and hence the meeting called by Blair to forestall it. In his letter to Tilden, Blair denounced both Seward and Chase. The union of the two to control the Democratic party, if successful, "would bring not only defeat, but eternal disgrace on the Democracy."<sup>2</sup> Montgomery Blair in the *Washington Evening Star*<sup>3</sup> supported the theory that Seward was behind the movement. Seward, he thought, influenced the President in opposition to the interests of Seymour. Blair charged that Seward felt himself politically dead if either Seymour or Grant should win. Under Johnson, Chase, or Hancock, he would still have a future.

That a change in the ticket was considered before the October election results were known, was stated by the *New York Herald*.<sup>4</sup> "It seems a movement, having for its object the withdrawal of Seymour and Blair, was commenced here a few days before the election by certain gentlemen who foresaw defeat in Pennsylvania, Ohio and perhaps Indiana. . . . I am told the same policy was discussed last week in New York, and perhaps the scheme . . . originated in that city and was only further considered here."

Another explanation of the origin of the proposal of the *World* that the ticket be changed was given in the *New York Herald* for October 30. On October 14, the day after the election, according to this account, S. L. M. Barlow of New York wrote to Montgomery Blair, suggesting a change, but Blair refused to take part in the movement. Seward's name was linked with the proposal, his participation not being "out of any friendship for the Democracy." The *Nation* (October 22) declared that the thought "was first conceived by Mr. Washington McLean and some of the other Pendleton leaders in Ohio." It also suggested "that all hope

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<sup>2</sup> *Tilden Letters*, vol. i, pp. 198-199. Dated 1865 in error.

<sup>3</sup> In *New York Times*, October 20, 1868.

<sup>4</sup> October 16, 1868.

## THE ELECTION OF 1868

of electing their Presidential candidates having been lost, our Democratic politicians in New York resolved to take some means of impressing the New York rank and file with the necessity of trading Seymour votes for Republican votes for Hoffman and assemblymen." The New York **Sun** stated that one effect of the movement in New York would be that "no senseless notion of fidelity to candidates who cannot be elected will now prevent the Democracy from making regular exchanges in favor of candidates who can be." When the politicians of New York understand this they will praise the **World** as heartily as they now condemn it.<sup>5</sup>

A more elaborate explanation was given by the New York **Evening Telegram**. Just after the Maine election, Barlow of New York and others asked Seymour if he would withdraw in favor of Chase or Johnson if the Democrats lost the October elections. They claimed to represent the National Committee in asking this question. Seymour was said to have given a written reply, disclaiming any personal desire for the Presidency, and leaving himself in the hands of his friends as to his action in the contingency mentioned. With this document, Barlow opened negotiations with John H. Coyle in Washington and Washington McLean in Cincinnati, offering to pledge support to the nomination of Pendleton in 1872, if the Western Democracy would agree to the contemplated change in the ticket. Coyle agreed, but the Pendleton supporters held back until October 12 or 13, when they telegraphed the Democratic leaders in New York that they were ready for the change. But Frank Blair refused to withdraw. The **World** then undertook to drive Blair from the field, and the conspirators also opened fire in Washington and the West with a declaration that the present Democratic ticket was hope-

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<sup>5</sup> In New York **Tribune**, October 20, 1868.

## THE ELECTION OF 1868

lessly defeated, and nothing could save the party but a change of front.<sup>6</sup>

Some features of this explanation were borne out by the action of the **National Intelligencer** (Coyle's paper) and the **Cincinnati Enquirer** (McLean's paper) in supporting the **World's** suggestion. But the absence of any material support for the **World** among the party leaders in New York indicates that the explanation is not wholly accurate. Mayor Hoffman, for example, denied the movement had the support of the party leaders, and stated it was made without their knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

That the feeling that Seymour should give way became articulate in Executive circles in Washington is shown by an entry in the diary of Secretary Welles for Wednesday, October 14. With the results of the election known, Welles called on the President, who told him that "Randall called just before I did and was feeling very blue, and when he left said he would telegraph Tilden to get Seymour out of the way. It was pretty evident, the President said, that the present ticket could have little hope." Welles commented that Johnson was not displeased with the turn things were taking, and had hopes that attention might yet be turned on himself. "But his intimacy with and support of Seward forecloses, if nothing else would, any such a movement. On that rock he split."<sup>8</sup>

The mention of Chase's name in connection with suggestions that the ticket be changed was not without some foundation. On September 10 Alexander Long wrote to Chase that Vallandigham, then a candidate for Congress had decided to withdraw if the Democrats lost Maine on September 14 by more than 18,000. Long had asked Val-

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<sup>6</sup> In **Cincinnati Commercial**, October 21, 1868 (New York, October 20).

<sup>7</sup> New York **Herald**, October 21, 1868.

<sup>8</sup> Vol. iii, pp. 453-454.

## THE ELECTION OF 1868

landigham if, in the event of his withdrawal, he would not "unite with a few discreet friends" and see Governor Seymour, with a view of inducing Seymour to withdraw in Chase's favor if the Democrats should fail to carry either Pennsylvania, Ohio or Indiana in the October elections. Vallandigham entertained the proposal favorably.<sup>9</sup>

Van Buren was also in touch with the situation. On October 8 Chase wrote him that in no contingency, "as it seems to me, can any change of front be made, nor indeed, is any change desirable."<sup>10</sup>

On October 15 the storm burst about the ticket. The most telling blow came from the New York **World**, in an editorial on "The Youthful, Indomitable Democracy." The **World** began by congratulating the party for doing so well in the October elections, considering that it was proclaimed dead by the Republicans only two or three years ago. "But our gains were not as great as the party desired and deserved." The party would have triumphed but for two things, the absence of either of which would have given victory—the military popularity of Grant and the perversions of General Blair's position. The slander about the position of Blair and some of the Southern leaders "has repelled more than votes enough to have turned the balance in our favor." The **World** called for the removal or neutralization of the influences barring the party from success. If the party had made mistakes these should be admitted and corrected now, rather than four years later. "If there is any impediment to success which can yet be removed by noble daring, or self-sacrificing virtue, or a bold stroke of policy, now is the hour for action!" — "The capacity of a few men to form a great resolution, may shape the destiny of the

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<sup>9</sup> Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania Library.

<sup>10</sup> Chase Papers, Library of Congress, Letter Book B.



## THE ELECTION OF 1868

country." This rather ambiguous appeal to the party contained no direct call for the resignation of Seymour. Blair was the cause of the trouble. The "few men" referred to were evidently the Democratic National Committee, which the **World** virtually asks to meet and make the necessary changes in the ticket. The **World** was supported in its position by the Washington **National Intelligencer**, which on October 16 reprinted the **World's** editorial of the 15th, and added its own endorsement.

The Republican papers of New York City naturally held that the **World's** proposal was the counsel of extremity. The **Evening Post** (October 15) thought that Seymour and Blair were impediments to Democratic success, but the platform was a greater one. The Democrats "have nothing to lose in the present campaign, for all is already lost." The New York **Times** (October 16) did not doubt the failure of the **World's** proposal, for "it arrays itself against the vital, governing forces of the Democracy." The **Herald** (October 17) thought that "no more suicidal policy could be suggested by the worst enemy of the Democracy," and added "What sane man would consent to stand in the breach at the eleventh hour?" The **Tribune** (October 16) was surprised that the **World**, hitherto an ardent Seymour supporter, should succumb to pressure. Seymour, added the **Tribune**, was more dangerous than Blair to the Democratic party. The Springfield **Republican** (October 17) commented on the demoralization of the Democratic party. "All this is delicious reading to Republicans."

The consternation among the Democratic leaders in Washington as a result of the **World's** proposal was given by a dispatch to the **Times**. "The Democratic managers here anticipated such a move, and have been at work since yesterday to see what they could do. But all is confusion. . .

## THE ELECTION OF 1868

Some want Chase, some want Hendricks, some want Hancock, and still others curse the **World** and its friends for their cowardice."<sup>11</sup>

Gideon Welles in his diary for October 15 gives some insight into the situation and his own views in it. "Seymour is doomed to defeat, and at this late day a rally for another can hardly be made, if attempted." Although there had been a good deal of talk of throwing aside the ticket, "this talk is idle." It might not be difficult, since the last elections, to persuade Seymour to withdraw, but the substitution of Chase would not make the ticket stronger. "The talk about the President means nothing. There is no intention to make him the candidate. . . . I am sorry he listens to it." On the 16th Welles expressed his preference for Hancock or Doolittle, if a change was to be made, although he felt that a "change of front at this late day would be a pretty certain precursor of defeat."<sup>12</sup>

While the Democrat pot was boiling so merrily, Chief Justice Chase was in correspondence with his friend Alexander Long, who wrote from Cincinnati on the 15th, "Confidential," that he was sending his law partner (George F. Hoeffler) to Washington to consult Chase on matters not suitable for telegraphing. "The demand among the Democrats for the withdrawal of Seymour and Blair and the substitution of yourself with Franklin, Ewing or some one else is universal." Blair, in Cincinnati, admitted all was lost and would cheerfully withdraw, according to Long. The Ohio Democratic State Central Committee had been called together by telegraph to meet in Columbus on October 16. Long expected the Committee to demand a change in the ticket and the nomination of Chase, and he urged Chase to

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<sup>11</sup> October 16, 1868.

<sup>12</sup> Vol. iii, pp. 454-455, 458.

## THE ELECTION OF 1868

accept the nomination without hesitation. "Your success will be triumphant and one of the grandest achievements ever accomplished in popular government."<sup>13</sup>

The suggestion of the **World** was not permitted to go unrebuked by those Democrats who were not stricken with panic. Belmont, Tilden and Augustus Schell met it with the statement to J. D. Hoover of the Washington Congressional Committee on October 15: "No authority or possibility to change front. All our friends consider it totally impracticable and equivalent to disbanding our forces. We in New York are not panic stricken."<sup>14</sup> The Washington correspondent of the Boston **Post** stated that the article in the **Intelligencer** on October 16 was written before the reception of the telegram from Tilden, Belmont and Schell. If advance copies had not already been given out to radical correspondents it would have been suppressed.<sup>15</sup> The espousal of the **World's** suggestion by the **National Intelligencer** on October 16 "produced a storm of indignation among the Democrats here who, without exception, ridiculed the nonsense of the New York **World**." No one was louder in denouncing the folly of the **World** than President Johnson, "who laughs at the crowings of the Radicals" and "professes today strong confidences in the election of Seymour and Blair."<sup>16</sup> The New York **Tribune** also stated that President Johnson thought the proposal injurious and ill timed, nor had he intimated a wish to replace Seymour.<sup>17</sup>

Hancock was unwilling to have anything to do with the movement, and he earnestly dissuaded the movers in it from pressing it further.<sup>18</sup> He was reported to have said

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<sup>13</sup> New York Historical Society Library, Misc. Mss. Long.

<sup>14</sup> New York **Herald**, October 17 (Washington, October 16, 1868).

<sup>15</sup> In Utica **Observer**, October 19, 1868.

<sup>16</sup> Albany **Argus**, October 19.

<sup>17</sup> October 19, 1868.

<sup>18</sup> New York **Herald**, October 17.

## THE ELECTION OF 1868

that the defeat of the party was certain, whatever it might do. General Rosecrans was quoted to the effect that it was too late for a change in front.<sup>19</sup> The report was very general that Chase refused to listen to the suggestion that he replace Seymour. The Washington correspondent of the Cincinnati **Commercial** October 17 reported Chase as saying that "he looked upon the talk about a change of candidates as a tempest without wind or water. . . . He was not seeking a candidacy for the Presidency and did not desire it." The Boston **Post's** correspondent said that Chase "expressed his astonishment that anyone pretending to have a particle of political sagacity should be guilty of the folly exhibited in the columns of the New York **World**."<sup>20</sup>

Few Democratic newspapers followed the lead of the **World**. Opposition to the suggestion was prompt and general. The Washington **Evening Express** of October 16 wanted to know why "we are called on at this time to surrender. . . . Now is the time for a renewed vigorous charge all along the line." The Rochester **Union** proclaimed that "The Democracy with one voice indignantly reject the evil counsel of the **World**, and the Utica **Observer** echoed with "Form the lines closer, men. Yield no particle of hope."<sup>21</sup>

The Memphis **Avalanche** denounced the suggestion of the **World** as all bosh. "The Democratic party is pledged to party leaders." The Newark **Journal** spoke of the **World** as "a noted skirmisher rather than a regular soldier," which "is about to unfurl the white flag in the presence of the enemy."<sup>22</sup> Perhaps the bitterest denunciation of the **World** came from the New York **Democrat**, Brick Pomeroy's paper. "Traitor, fool, renegade, tool of wicked power; un-

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<sup>19</sup> Cincinnati **Commercial**, October 17, 1868.

<sup>20</sup> In Albany **Argus**, October 19, 1868.

<sup>21</sup> Albany **Argus**, October 19, 1868.

<sup>22</sup> In New York **Times**, October 18, 1868.

## THE ELECTION OF 1868

cover your head, take off your shoes, for the place where thou dost stand is holy ground. Your fire will die out, but the bush of Democracy will live for pilgrims to rest under the shade thereof, after turning aside to spit on your graves!"<sup>23</sup> The Albany **Argus** (October 19) referring to the **World's** proposal said "The Democracy of the Nation repels the suggestion of a capitulation or retreat." Other papers opposed to the suggested change in the ticket were the New York **Evening Express**, Louisville **Courier**, Macon (Ga.) **Telegraph**, Detroit **Free Press**, Nashville **Union and American**, Harrisburg **Patriot**, Buffalo **Courier** and the Rochester **Union**.

While this agitation was occurring in the press, the position taken towards it by the candidates — Seymour and Blair — was of great public interest. The chief target of the **World's** attacks was Blair. He announced his willingness to retire in a speech at St. Louis on the evening of October 16, "Whenever by so doing I can add one vote to the strength of the Democracy." He was "ready to make any sacrifice." Referring to a report that both he and Seymour had signified their intention to decline in favor of some other candidates, Blair said, "both candidates will always be ready to lay down their candidacy when it can no longer be of service to the Democratic party." Blair announced his determination not to abandon the field "in one sense at least I mean to bear my share of the battle; whether in the ranks or as an officer will depend on the wishes of the Democratic party."<sup>24</sup> Both Seymour and Blair were reported to have telegraphed to the Executive Committee that they were willing to act for the best interests of the party.<sup>25</sup> Before making the speech at St. Louis on the 16th, the latter wrote

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<sup>23</sup> New York **Tribune**, October 20, 1868.

<sup>24</sup> New York **Herald**, October 18; Utica **Observer**, October 19, 1868.

<sup>25</sup> Cincinnati **Commercial**, October 18, 1868.

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to his father asking Tilden and the senior Blair to judge what action he should take. Blair, Sr., wrote to Tilden on October 29 asking that, if any change in the ticket was contemplated, he telegraph him and he would come to see him.<sup>26</sup> Tilden wired on the 20th "without contemplating any change, I should be glad to consult with you."<sup>27</sup>

The opposition of Belmont and his Committee to the proposal of the **World** was unrelenting. In addition to the telegram to J. D. Hoover of the Washington Committee, Belmont, Tilden and Schell telegraphed to W. F. Storey, the Democratic National Committeeman from Illinois, on October 17, in reply to a query, that the suggested change "was wholly unauthorized and unknown to National Democratic Executive Committee or any member thereof." It was branded as absurd and as having been received by the masses of the party with astonishment, derision and indignation. An optimistic estimate of the October elections followed. "We came nearer to our expectations than Republicans to theirs," and "continued effort by the Democracy would be crowned with success."<sup>28</sup>

On Saturday, October 17, at Utica, a conference took place between Seymour and some members of the National Executive Committee, at which Seymour said that any changes which should be made must include his withdrawal; that he was nominated against his wishes, and it would be a relief for him if another name were substituted for his own. The Committee replied that no change had been contemplated and that in their judgment, nothing could be so injurious to the Democratic cause as a change of candidates.<sup>29</sup> The sponsors of the movement wanted Bel-

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<sup>26</sup> **Tilden Letters**, vol. i, p. 198 (date given in error as 1865).

<sup>27</sup> **Ibid.**, p. 251.

<sup>28</sup> **Tilden Letters**, vol. i, p. 251.

<sup>29</sup> **Utica Observer**, October 19, 1868; also **New York Herald and World**.

## THE ELECTION OF 1868

man of his party. We do speak of those who have pulled wires, handled pursestrings, and concocted ideas for the organization. Undoubtedly the ablest conceivable efforts might not have succeeded, although we think they would have done so.<sup>33</sup>

The New York **Herald** on October 19 reported that Democratic politicians in Washington were "abusing Belmont soundly for his alleged ineptness, and charged him with even worse, for they say he has sold out to the enemy and that his continued refusal to summon the ticket together is explainable on that theory." This attitude is that of those opposed to his refusal to approve the change in candidates. The question may well be raised, however, to what extent was the agitation due to the failure of Belmont's leadership? It is hard to see how he could have acted differently, once the proposal got into print, and it is equally hard to see how he could have prevented a public discussion of a suggestion that had occurred to so many. As has been shown, the **World** was not the only source of the proposal. It is possible that closer relations between the National Committee and the party press might have kept the newspapers from airing the troubles of the party to the extent they did. That is only conjecture. It is also possible that an appeal to the voters, stressing party unity and confidence in the ticket, issued immediately upon the publication of the **World's** suggestion, might have taken the edge off that proposal. But again that is conjecture.

On October 20 Chairman Tilden of the New York State Committee issued an address corresponding to the national address of Belmont. Here again no reference was made to the suggestion by the **World**. After comparing the Democratic vote in October with that of 1866, the address stated: "You have driven the Republicans to the baggage wagons.

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<sup>33</sup> October 17, 1868.

## THE ELECTION OF 1868

You have almost routed them. Fellow Democrats! Is this a moment for doubt as to what you ought to do?"<sup>34</sup>

On October 30 a Democratic Convention of the Eastern District of Rhode Island adopted a resolution disapproving of the suggested change in candidates, declaring the entire satisfaction of the Convention with Seymour and Blair, and pledging them hearty support. The Democratic State Committee of Connecticut also issued an address denouncing all proposals for a change in candidates, and ending "Cowards may go to the rear. The Old Guard steps forward firmly to the front."<sup>35</sup>

The interpretation given by the Republican press to the movement to replace the Democratic ticket indicated plainly the folly of the Democrats in washing their party linen in full view of the enemy. The **Tribune** gleefully announced that the Democracy was disintegrating and that "suave qui peut" was now the cry of their ranks. The Springfield **Republican** said that the proposal emphasized the extent and meaning of the Republican victories in October. **Harper's Weekly** called the proposal of the **World** "the crowning folly of an extremely foolish newspaper," and said that as the country rejected the policy of the Democratic party in the elections, an effort was being made to renounce the policy. The Chicago **Republican** thought the object of the movement was not victory in November, but to form an organization including all elements of opposition to the Republican party, and which shall "turn its back upon the dead issues of the past." The failure of the movement, according to Godkin, was due to the fact that it was produced too late. "The only result of the **World's** outburst was to satisfy the public that the Democratic politicians them-

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<sup>34</sup> **McPherson Scrap Book**, Library of Congress, vol. ii, p. 22.

<sup>35</sup> **Washington Express**, October 24, 1868.



## THE ELECTION OF 1868

selves had given up the game as lost. . . . There is perhaps now plenty of bitter repentance in the Democratic ranks for not having nominated Chase.”<sup>36</sup>

A conservative view of the situation was offered by John Quincy Adams in a conversation on the train while returning from his South Carolina trip. Adams shrewdly remarked “It is now too late to change the candidates. The election of General Grant is inevitable, and such a movement would materially damage the interests of the Democracy.” He did not believe that Chase could ever have defeated Grant, and said that he certainly could not do so if made the nominee so late in the campaign. Adams blamed the Democratic platform more than the candidates for the impending defeat of the party. The Democracy, he asserted, should have gone before the country on one issue—reconstruction.<sup>37</sup>

Reference has been made to Seymour’s reluctance to take an active personal part in the campaign. He felt that stump speaking by a candidate for the presidency was incompatible with the dignity attached to the nomination. Seymour’s position on this point was reenforced by the refusal of his rival, Grant, to take the rostrum. But the advantages of this situation all lay with the Republicans, for Grant lacked ability in public speaking, while Seymour was one of the most effective orators in his party.

Seymour’s wishes were generally respected until the campaign in Pennsylvania became keen, when he was requested by various leaders to speak in that State. Among these were William Wallace, Pennsylvania Chairman, and

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<sup>36</sup> New York, October 29; London **Daily News**, November 10, 1868.

<sup>37</sup> New York **World**, October 21, 1868.

## THE ELECTION OF 1868

William Cassidy, editor of the Albany **Argus**.<sup>38</sup> Seymour did not accede to these requests, and the October elections passed without his appearance on a political platform. Up to October 13 the only speeches he made were non-political addresses at Albany and at the Saratoga Agricultural fair. In these speeches he made no reference to the issues of the day, and at Saratoga confined himself to eulogizing farm life and discussing the every day problems of the farmer.<sup>39</sup>

The Republican gains in October, and the resulting signs of panic in certain Democratic quarters, were probably the reasons why Seymour abandoned this passive attitude and agreed to take the stump actively. When he did so, he did so completely, and made a tour which extended as far west as Chicago.

The New York **World** announced on October 20 that Seymour would break his silence, and would open his personal campaign in Buffalo on October 22. Seymour's home paper, the Utica **Observer**, was enthusiastic over the tour Seymour was to make. "Our Chieftain Leads the Host" was its heading for an article which stated that in the crisis Seymour had risen above personal considerations. "He is moved by no ambition: he is deterred by no obloquy. Now, as ever, he meets the emergency of the hour and treads the road that duty points."<sup>40</sup>

It was the announcement that Seymour was to take the stump which drew from President Johnson his most active contribution to the Democratic campaign—his wire to Seymour expressing the hope that the tour would result in victory.

At the same time that Seymour went West, Blair came East, and spoke at Tammany Hall on October 27. The

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<sup>38</sup> **Seymour Papers**, Albany.

<sup>39</sup> Utica **Observer**, September 10, 11, 1868.

<sup>40</sup> October 21, 1868.

## THE ELECTION OF 1868

**World's** hostile attitude toward Blair was reflected in its reception of his speech, which it attempted to "soft pedal" while the **Herald** defended him for his frankness.<sup>41</sup>

Seymour left Utica on his tour on October 21,<sup>42</sup> accompanied by Francis Kernan. The trip lasted until the day before the election, November 2, when he returned to Utica. He spoke at Syracuse and Rochester, October 21; Buffalo, October 22; Cleveland, October 23; Chicago, October 24; Indianapolis, October 26; Columbus, October 27; Pittsburgh, October 28; Harrisburg and Reading, October 29; Philadelphia, October 30; and Wilkes-Barre, October 31. He returned to Utica by way of New York City. On various parts of his tour the local Democratic leaders joined him briefly, and he delivered many short talks at small cities and towns along his way.

In his speeches Seymour emphasized the conservative character of the Democratic programme, and decried all proposals for changing existing conditions by means other than the usual processes of law. He attacked the Republicans for their extravagance, and maintained that this lay at the root of the currency difficulties. He denounced the Republican attacks on the Supreme Court and the President as unconstitutional. The Radical reconstruction policy was oppressive to the South, and should be abandoned, but only by orderly and lawful means. Seymour proclaimed that his party stood for a return to orderly, peaceable constitutional government, with the States equal before the Federal government and with civil authority supreme over military authority. He tended to ignore the greenback and suffrage issues.

In short, he made clear his opinion that the Republicans,

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<sup>41</sup> Stebbins, *op. cit.*, p. 384.

<sup>42</sup> Details of tour from Utica **Observer**, **New York World** and **Public Record**.

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not the Democrats, were the revolutionists and the violators of the Constitution. A vote for him would be a vote for a return to Constitutional Federalism, and a Democratic victory would heal the wounds of the war, which had been kept inflamed by the Republican policy.

The Springfield **Republican** considered the tour a failure, and criticised the Democrats for not standing up squarely to the programme which was marked out by the platform and the nominations.<sup>43</sup> This was the position taken generally by the Republican press. But after the votes were in, Seymour was assured by Church that his trip had been of great service. "It saved us in this State, and put the party in excellent condition. It was a great advantage to you personally, as you came out of the fight with flying colors."<sup>44</sup>

On November 3, the highest hopes of the Republicans were realized, and Grant was elected by 214 electoral votes to 80 for Seymour.<sup>45</sup> The popular vote was 3,012,833 for Grant and 2,703,249 for Seymour; or in percentages, 52.71% and 47.29%. Seymour carried only Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and Oregon. If the former Confederate States (except Virginia, Mississippi and Texas, which did not vote, and Florida whose electors were chosen by the legislature) are taken as a unit we find that they gave Grant 401,199, or 48.3% and Seymour 429,840, or 51.7%. Seymour received a majority of the popular vote in the South and at the same time the electoral vote from only two of these States, the

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<sup>43</sup> October 30, 1868.

<sup>44</sup> November 16, 1868, **Seymour Papers**, Albany.

<sup>45</sup> Election figures from **American Annual Cyclopedia**, 1868; Stanwood, **Presidency**, vol. i, p. 328, McPherson, **Reconstruction**; and **Tribune, Democratic and World Almanac**, 1869. See Appendix A and C.

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reason for this lay in the large Democratic majority in the two states carried, Georgia and Louisiana. Taking the non-Confederate, or "loyal" States as a unit, we find that Grant received 2,611,634 or 53.5%, and Seymour, 2,273,400 or 46.5%. This figure may be compared with the percentage of the total vote cast for McClelland in 1864—44.1%; a gain for the Democrats in 1868 of nearly 2.5%. Dividing the North into sections we get the following percentages for 1868:

Section	Grant	Seymour
New England . . . . .	63.1	36.9
Middle States . . . . .	50.5	49.5
Loyal Slave . . . . .	41.1	58.9
Middle West . . . . .	54.6	45.4
Trans-Mississippi . . . . .	63.9	36.1
Far West . . . . .	50.6	49.4
Total . . . . .	53.5	46.5

A significant fact about Seymour's vote is that it ran consistently behind the State Democratic vote, whether cast in October or November. Grant ran ahead of the State tickets in every Northern State but one. In Delaware Grant received ten votes less than the Republican Congressional candidate, and Seymour received nineteen votes more than the Democrat running for Congress. Taking the North (or rather those States, North, West, and Border which were never in the Confederacy) as a whole, we find that the Democratic State tickets (or Congressional in some instances) polled 48.1% of the vote cast, compared with Seymour's 46.5%.

It is interesting to speculate as to the result, if Seymour could have carried the "solid South" as was done by Democratic candidates from 1880 on. Grant received 52 Southern votes, including Missouri as a Southern State. Twenty-three electoral votes were not cast — those of Mississippi,

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Texas and Virginia. Adding these 75 votes to Seymour's 80 gives 155. Subtracting the 52 votes from Grant's 214 gives 162. Therefore, the Democrats could not justly say that Grant was elected through the operation of the reconstruction acts.

In members of Congress, the Democrats made a slight gain; instead of fifty representatives in the Fortieth Congress (elected in 1866), they had sixty-one in the Forty-First. The number of Democratic Senators in the new Congress decreased by two, however. Senators Dixon of Connecticut, Buckalew of Pennsylvania, Patterson of Tennessee, and Doolittle of Wisconsin were replaced by Republicans. Thomas F. Bayard succeeded James A. Bayard as one of the Democratic Senators from Delaware. Willard Saulsbury, Democrat, held over. Besides Bayard, William T. Hamilton of Maryland, John P. Stockton of New Jersey and Eugene Casserly of California were new Democrats in the Senate. The total in the Fortieth Congress was 12. In the Forty-First it was 10.

The changes in the lower House were:

State	Fortieth Congress		Forty-First Congress	
	Republicans	Democrats	Republicans	Democrats
Connecticut .....	1	3	3	1
New York .....	20	11	18	13
New Jersey .....	3	2	2	3
Maryland .....	1	4	0	5
Tennessee .....	7	1	8	0
Ohio .....	16	3	13	6
Indiana .....	8	3	7	4
Illinois .....	11	3	10	4
Missouri .....	8	1	6	3
Minnesota .....	2	0	1	1
Oregon .....	1	0	0	1
Alabama .....	6	0	5	1

It is interesting to note that apart from the reconstructed South (where conditions were abnormal) the members of

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the lower houses of the State legislatures varied as follows:<sup>46</sup>

1864 .....	1747	Republicans	593	Democrats
1865 .....	1793	"	658	"
1866 .....	1848	"	659	"
1867 .....	1761	"	1125	"
1868 .....	1889	"	996	"

The negro suffrage issue appeared in three states in the form of proposals to put negro suffrage in the State Constitutions. The proposal was defeated in Missouri (74,053 to 55,236) and carried in Minnesota. The Democrats claimed that the result was obtained by trickery.<sup>47</sup> In Nevada the Constitutional change was made by the legislature, which as elected in 1868 was Republican by a large majority in both houses. "White" was struck from the State Constitution by a vote of nearly two to one.<sup>48</sup>

Republican charges of fraud against the Democrats in the few States they did carry were general, but the situation in New York City<sup>49</sup> was the one most widely aired. Attention was attracted to New York by the fact that Seymour carried the State by exactly ten thousand votes. Charges and counter-charges of fraud in the coming election were freely made in New York City for some weeks before the balloting.<sup>50</sup> Following Seymour's victory, a Congressional investigation was demanded by the Union League Club of New York City,<sup>51</sup> and a select committee was appointed by the House of Representatives to look into the facts. The

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<sup>46</sup> These figures, noted from the *Annual Cyclopaedia* and the almanacs, are probably not precise, but they are approximately complete for the 26 non-Confederate States.

<sup>47</sup> *American Annual Cyclopaedia*, 1868, p. 505.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 533.

<sup>49</sup> For general discussion, see Alexander, *op. cit.*, chapter 15, Stebbins, *op. cit.*, chapter 14, Myers, *Tammany Hall* (New York, 1917) p. 217 and following.

<sup>50</sup> For example, *New York Tribune*, October 22, *New York World*, October 30, *New York Evening Post*, November 2, *Nation*, October 29.

<sup>51</sup> *New York Evening Post*, November 6, 1868.

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report of the committee accused the Democrats of "every known crime against the elective franchise."<sup>52</sup>

The unusual fact that Seymour had exactly 10,000 votes more than Grant gave rise to a charge that this result was obtained fraudulently in order to save bets the Democrats had made upon their majority.<sup>53</sup> But the official tabulation of the votes gave this precise result by comparing the votes received by a single Democratic elector and a single Republican elector, each at the head of the list. A comparison of the thirty-two other electors on each side gives a variation in one case as high as 94 votes.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, if Tweed padded the city vote to overcome the up-state votes as was charged,<sup>55</sup> how did it happen that he hit the mark by exactly 10,000 votes when his information about the up-state results was wired to him before the actual counting? This tabulation up-state in most instances would not have been in the hands of Democrats exclusively or even largely. The districts were Republican. With the city vote padded to overcome an approximate lead, in order for the count to come out exactly at any predetermined figure, it would have been necessary to "adjust" the up-state vote in accordance with the inflated city vote. This was obviously impossible.

It was freely charged before the election that Seymour was to be "knifed" in order to make Hoffman's victory certain. At first glance, the fact that Hoffman received some 10,000 more votes than Seymour would tend to suggest that trading had taken place. On the other hand, Seymour ran behind his ticket in every Northern State but one (Del-

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<sup>52</sup> 40th Congress, vol. iii, **Session House Reports**, nos. 31, 40 (paged consecutively), p. 4. Also **Senate Miscellaneous Documents**, no. 4.

<sup>53</sup> E. g. Curtis, **Republican Party**, vol. i, p. 509.

<sup>54</sup> Official canvass in **Utica Observer**, extra, no date, in Library of Congress.

<sup>55</sup> **New York Evening Post**, November 3, 1868.



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ware). That he should fall behind Hoffman by 10,000 in the largest State in the Union was not suspicious — it was only consistent. It is possible that some trading took place, but it is not likely that it was extensive or that it was done on a large scale or in an organized manner.

While New York City received the spotlight in connection with the charges of fraud in the election, it was not the only State which the Republicans alleged was won by the Democrats through the use of illegal methods. The **Nation** on November 12 charged that Georgia and Louisiana were carried by “organized assassination,” and that New Jersey as well as New York was gained by fraud. Allegations of fraud were also made in connection with the bare Democratic majority of 165 in Oregon. In this instance it was charged that voters were brought in from the Idaho and Montana regions.<sup>56</sup>

When the Senate came to count the electoral vote in February, objection was made to that of Georgia on the grounds that the State had not fully complied with the Reconstruction Acts; that the electors of the State had not met to cast their vote on the proper day; and that the election in Georgia had not been fairly conducted. After a hectic discussion, the Senate voted 28 to 25 to count Georgia’s vote, and the House voted 150 to 41 not to count it. The vote was formally announced as 80 for Seymour with Georgia and 71 for Seymour without Georgia, Grant being elected in either case.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Woodward, **Political Parties in Oregon** (Portland, 1913), p. 264.

<sup>57</sup> Stanwood, **Presidency**, vol. i, p. 331.

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