

Chapter Three

“Separated from His Father, He Studied English Grammar”:

New Salem (1831-1834)

In 1848, the thirty-nine-year-old Lincoln offered some sage advice to his law partner, William H. Herndon, who had complained that he and other young Whigs were being discriminated against by older Whigs. In denying the allegation, Lincoln urged him to avoid thinking of himself as a victim: “The way for a young man to rise, is to improve himself every way he can, never suspecting that any body wishes to hinder him. Allow me to assure you, that suspicion and jealousy never did help any man in any situation. There may sometimes be ungenerous attempts to keep a young man down; and they will succeed too, if he allows his mind to be diverted from its true channel to brood over the attempted injury. Cast about, and see if this feeling has not injured every person you have ever known to fall into it.”¹

By his own account, Lincoln began his emancipated life “a strange, friendless, uneducated, penniless boy.”² After escaping from his paternal home, he spent three years preparing himself for a way of life far different from the hardscrabble existence that he had been born into. As he groped his way toward a new identity, he improved himself every way he could.

FRONTIER BOATMAN, HUMORIST, AND JACK-OF-ALL-TRADES

¹ Lincoln to Herndon, Washington, 10 July 1848, in Roy P. Basler et al., eds., Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln (8 vols. plus index; New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), 1:497.

² Lincoln to Martin S. Morris, Springfield, 26 March 1843, ibid., 1:320.

To earn some pennies, Lincoln accepted an offer from a Kentucky entrepreneur named Denton Offutt to take a flatboat to New Orleans, as he had done two years earlier.³ Offutt was a garrulous, bibulous, “short, rather stockily built man, of good natured, amiable disposition, free handed and of great sociability – a trader and speculator who always had his eyes open to the main chance.”⁴ Lincoln’s friends thought him “wild,” “reckless,” “unsteady,” “noisy,” “fussy,” “rattle brained,” “unprovidential,” “gassy,” “windy,” and “careless.”⁵ A sheriff from whose jail Offutt escaped in 1834 depicted him as “very talkative” and wishing to pass “for a gentleman.”⁶ He was something of a confidence man, peddling a magical expression that would allegedly tame horses when whispered into their ears.⁷ In 1831, by buying corn, beef, and pork cheap and peddling it in the South, Offutt sought to recoup losses he had sustained in an ill-starred pork-packing enterprise.⁸

³ For biographical sketches of Offutt, see James S. Offutt, “Denton Offutt, Employer and Friend of Lincoln at New Salem,” mimeographed essay, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield; William H. Townsend, Lincoln and the Bluegrass: Slavery and Civil War in Kentucky (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1955), 30-45, 150-53; Molly McKenzie, “A Demographic Study of Select New Salem Precinct Residents” (unpublished manuscript, 1979, Sangamon Valley Collection, Lincoln Public Library, Springfield), 81-85.

⁴ Thomas P. Reep, Lincoln at New Salem (Chicago: Old Salem Lincoln League, 1927), 98.

⁵ James Short to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 7 July 1865, Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements about Abraham Lincoln (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 73; Mentor Graham to Herndon (interview), Petersburg, Illinois, 29 May 1865, ibid., 9; Hardin Bale to Herndon (interview), Petersburg, Illinois, 29 May 1865, ibid., 13; William G. Greene to Herndon (interview), Elm Wood, Illinois, 30 May 1865, ibid., 18.

⁶ Vincennes, Indiana, Western Sun & General Advertiser, 27 December 1834, quoted in Douglas L. Wilson, Honor’s Voice: The Transformation of Abraham Lincoln (New York: Knopf, 1998), 335n15.

⁷ Offutt sold this secret for \$5 to customers who pledged not to reveal it. James Hall to Herndon, St. Denis, Maryland, 17 September 1873, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 580. After leaving New Salem in 1832, Offutt became a horse tamer. Thompson Ware McNeely’s reminiscences, Walter B. Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Michael Burlingame (1916; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 190-92. William G. Greene saw Offutt in the 1840s in Memphis “posing as a veterinary surgeon, and also as a horse tamer. He was fantastically arrayed and prone to garrulity, but seemed to be eking out an existence by his calling.” Henry Clay Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, vol. 1 of A Life of Lincoln, ed. Marion Mills Miller (2 vols.; New York: Baker and Taylor, 1908), 86. See also “Dr. Denton Offutt: Horse Tamer,” Abraham Lincoln Quarterly 2 (1943): 330-33; Offutt, A New and Complete System of Teaching the Horse on Phrenological Principles; also, A Rule for Selecting the Best Animals, and Mode of Teaching All Beasts Your Will, Breeding of Horses, and Cure of Part of Their Diseases (Cincinnati: Appleton’s Queen City Press, 1848); and Offutt to

Lincoln obtained his job with Offutt through his cousin John Hanks, a skilled riverman. In February 1831, Offutt proposed to Hanks that he run a flatboat of goods to New Orleans. Hanks took Offutt to see his cousin Lincoln, who said: “I am seeking employment. I have had some experience in boating and boat building, and if you are in want of hands I think I can give you satisfaction.”⁹ Offutt hired Hanks, Lincoln, and John D. Johnston to make the trip south as soon as the snow melted.¹⁰ Lincoln was to receive 50¢ per day plus a small share of the profits.¹¹

In March, the adventuresome trio paddled a canoe from Decatur to Springfield, where they discovered Offutt in the Buckhorn Tavern, dead drunk at midday.¹² After sobering up, Offutt confessed that he had failed to obtain a flatboat, and commissioned the three young men to build one, with the help of a knowledgeable carpenter, Charles P. Cabanis.¹³ They hiked five miles north to the mouth of Spring Creek, felled trees, rafted the logs to a sawmill near Sangamotown, and constructed a vessel eighty feet long and eighteen feet wide.¹⁴

Lincoln, Paris, Kentucky, 7 September 1859, and Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 11 February 1861, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁸ George E. Cabanis, undated letter to the editor, Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 12 January 1874.

⁹ John Hanks, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 456; Charles Maltby, The Life and Public Services of Abraham Lincoln (Stockton, California: Daily Independent Steam Print, 1884), 25.

¹⁰ John Hanks, interview with Herndon, [1865-6], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 456; autobiography written for John L. Scripps, [ca. June 1860], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:63.

¹¹ Letter by J. A. L., Chicago, 23 February 1895, New York Tribune, 1 March 1895. The author claimed to have heard Lincoln describe this episode.

¹² Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 70.

¹³ George E. Cabanis, son of the carpenter, undated letter to the editor, Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 12 January 1874. In 1860, this gentleman told Lincoln: “I still remember when first I Saw your Self and Denton Offit at the house of Charles P. Cabanis.” George E. Cabanis to Lincoln, [near Platteville, Wisconsin], 12 August 1860, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁴ George E. Cabanis, undated letter to the editor, Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 12 January 1874; John Hanks to Herndon (interview), Chicago, 13 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 44; John Hanks, statement for Herndon, [1865-66], ibid., 456-57; Caleb Carman, interview with Herndon,

During the weeks he spent near the village of Sangamotown, Lincoln ingratiated himself through his humor and bonhomie, despite his unprepossessing appearance. John E. Roll, who helped build the flatboat, pictured Lincoln as “an awful clumsy looking man,” wearing a “homespun suit of clothes,” a “big pair of cowhide boots, with his trousers strapped down under them,” a short “roundabout” coat, and “an old slouch wool hat.” Whenever he bent over, he exposed several inches of his suspenders.¹⁵ Erastus Wright observed Lincoln “as he pounded away” on the flatboat, stripped to the waist, with his pants “rolled up to his knees and shirt wet with sweat and combing his fuzzie hair with his fingers.”¹⁶ Among others things, Lincoln had to chop notches and remove the heavy blocks.¹⁷ For a time he boarded with Caleb Carman, who thought he looked quite odd. His “bad Apperance” at first disposed Carman to take him for “a Green horn” and “a fool,” but a half hour’s conversation persuaded him that Lincoln was in fact “a very inteligent young man” who conversed easily about books and politics.¹⁸ While at Sangamotown, Lincoln read biographies of George Washington and Francis (“The Swamp Fox”) Marion. When he spent evenings with Clawson Lacy’s family, his “comrades would sometimes follow him . . . to

Petersburg, Illinois, 12 October 1866, ibid., 373; William T. Baker, quoted in Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 125.

¹⁵ John E. Roll interviewed in the Chicago Times-Herald, 25 August 1895; Ida M. Tarbell, The Early Life of Abraham Lincoln (New York: McClure, 1896), 104; “Old Sangamo Town,” Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 12 November 1892.

¹⁶ Erastus Wright, manuscript journal, 1867, Wright Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

¹⁷ George E. Cabanis, undated letter to the editor, Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 12 January 1874.

¹⁸ Caleb Carman to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 30 November 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 429; Carman to Osborn H. Oldroyd, Petersburg, 2 April 1882, Carman Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. On Carman (1805-88), see McKenzie, “A Demographic Study of Select New Salem Precinct Residents,” 48-50. Lincoln may have lived a few weeks with the family of Charles Cabanis in the McKinnie settlement three miles north of Springfield. George E. Cabanis, undated letter to the editor, Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 12 January 1874.

swear at him for leaving them alone at old sledge,” a card game, but he “didn’t swear back, nor even get mad.”¹⁹

Lincoln’s personality and way with a funny story made him a celebrity in Sangamotown. Caleb Carman was impressed by the “Great many Jokes & yarns” told by Lincoln, who “was allways verry mery & full of fun.”²⁰ He “could make a cat laugh,” according to Clark E. Carr, who termed Lincoln “the most comical and jocose of human beings, laughing with the same zest at his own jokes as at those of others.” Never, Carr said, “have I seen another who provoked so much mirth, and who entered into rollicking fun with such glee.”²¹ Lincoln would frequently sit with Sangamotownsmen on a log and regale them with stories. Whenever he concluded one “in his unexpected way the boys on the log would whoop” so hard they fell off.²² Some of his humor was at his own expense. One night at Jacob Carman’s house, a magician cooked eggs in the hats of several men. When asked for his headgear, Lincoln replied, “Mr the reason why I didn’t give you my hat before was out of respect to your Eggs – not care for my hat.”²³ The hat became known as “Lincoln’s frying pan.”²⁴

¹⁹ Clawson Lacy in Volney Hickox, “Lincoln at Home,” Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 15 October 1874. New Jersey-born Clawson Lacy (b. 1801) was a farmer who in 1860 lived with his wife Phoebe in Salisbury Township, adjacent to Sangamotown. In 1831, John Lacy’s father (perhaps Clawson Lacy) walked from St. Louis to Springfield, where he bought a farm near Sangamo Town. John E. Roll in “Old Sangamon Town,” Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 12 November 1892.

²⁰ Caleb Carman to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 30 November 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 429; Carman to Osborn H. Oldroyd, Petersburg, 2 April 1882, Carman Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

²¹ Clark E. Carr, My Day and Generation (Chicago: McClurg, 1908), 107.

²² John E. Roll in Ida M. Tarbell, The Life of Abraham Lincoln (2 vols.; New York: McClure, Phillips, 1902), 1:53.

²³ Caleb Carman, interview with Herndon, Petersburg, 12 October 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 373. See also Carman, interview with Herndon, [March 1887], and John Hanks’s statement [1865-66], ibid., 607, 457.

²⁴ Clawson Lacy in Volney Hickox, “Lincoln at Home,” Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 15 October 1874.

Many of the stories Lincoln told at Sangamotown were crude, and his lifelong fondness for off-color humor became legendary.²⁵ In 1859, when asked “why do you not write out your stories & put them in a book,” Lincoln “drew himself up – fixed his face, as if a thousand dead carcasses – and a million of privies were Shooting all their Stench into his nostrils, and Said ‘Such a book would Stink like a thousand privies.’”²⁶ James Matheny recalled “that Lincoln’s mind ran to filthy stories – that a story had no fun in it unless it was dirty.”²⁷ Henry C. Whitney concurred, noting that the “great majority of Lincolns stories were very nasty indeed.”²⁸ Albert Taylor Bledsoe, who worked with Lincoln for eight years in Illinois, thought him “one of the most obscene men that ever lived.” He “never enjoyed his jokes so keenly, or with such a gusto, as when they were strongly seasoned with obscenity and filth.”²⁹ Usher Linder said of Lincoln’s uncle Mordecai: “He was quite a story-teller, and they were generally on the smutty order, and in this Abe resembled his Uncle Mord.”³⁰ The Ohio journalist Donn Piatt claimed that Lincoln “interlarded all his official acts with the dirtiest stories that ever fell from human lips.”³¹ A New-England-born lawyer who practiced

²⁵ Paul M. Zall, ed., Abe Lincoln Laughing: Humorous Anecdotes from Original Sources by and about Abraham Lincoln (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 7-8.

²⁶ Henry E. Dummer, interview with Herndon, [1865-6], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 442. Dummer added, “Lincoln had 2 characters – one of purity – & the other as it were an insane love in telling dirty and Smutty Stories – A good story of that Kind has a point with a sting to it.” Ibid., 442-43.

²⁷ Henry C. Whitney to Herndon, 23 June 1887, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 617.

²⁸ Whitney to Jesse Weik, Chicago, 17 September 1887, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 644.

²⁹ Bledsoe, review of Ward Hill Lamon, The Life of Abraham Lincoln, Southern Review 12 (April 1873): 347.

³⁰ Usher F. Linder, Reminiscences of the Early Bench and Bar of Illinois (Chicago: Chicago Legal News, 1879), 38.

³¹ Piatt, in the Washington Capital, n.d., quoted in John N. Taylor to Jesse W. Weik, Crawfordsville, Indiana, 25 November 1923, Weik Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. In the secession winter of 1860-61, Piatt had dinner with Lincoln one night in Springfield. As he later recalled, “Subsequent to the supper we had gathering at Mr. Lincoln’s old law office and at the political headquarters, at which men only formed the company; and before those good honest citizens . . . Mr. Lincoln gave way to his natural bent for fun, and told very amusing stories, always in quaint illustration of the subject under discussion, no one of which will bear printing. They were coarse, and were saved from vulgarity only by being so strangely in point, and told not for

with Lincoln in Illinois disapproved of Lincoln’s “raw” stories, yet even he “often rolled in his place in helpless laughter, they were so good and apt.”³²

William Herndon explained that even though “Lincoln’s jokes were vulgar – indecently so,” yet he “was not a dirty foul mouthed man by any means.” He “was raised among a peculiar people – an ignorant but good people – honest ones. Hence Mr Lincoln preferred jokes to fables or maxims as they, for his people, had the pith-point & force about them to make the point luminous – clear – plain.”³³ Leonard Swett reported that if “he told a good story . . . that [was] outrageously low and dirty, he never seemed to see that part of it. . . . Almost any man that will tell a vulgar story, has got in a degree a vulgar mind, but it was not so with him.”³⁴

Much as he favored stories that illustrated a point, Lincoln disliked vulgarity for its own sake. William Herndon recalled “a person who so far mistook Mr. Lincoln once as to tell a coarse story without purpose. During its recital Mr. Lincoln’s face worked impatiently. When the man had gone he said: ‘I had nearly put that fellow out of the office. He disgusts me.’”³⁵ During the Civil War, Lincoln expressed similar reservations about vulgar storytelling. A Massachusetts official, William Schouler, visited the White House in 1864 with

the sake of telling as if he enjoyed the stories themselves, but that they were . . . so quaintly illustrative.” Piatt, Memories of the Men Who Saved the Union (New York: Butler Brothers, 1887), 35.

³² The attorney was Charles R. Welles (d. 1854), whose great nephew was Horace R. Boynton, Jr. Boynton to Milton H. Shutes, Santa Barbara, California, 20 February 1948, copy, “Reminiscence” folders, Lincoln Reference files, Abraham Lincoln Association, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Boynton’s mother’s aunt was married to Welles. Born and educated in Connecticut, Welles moved to Springfield soon after graduating from Yale in 1834. He and Lincoln participated in many of the same cases in the 1840s and 1850s. Martha L. Benner and Cullom Davis et al., eds., The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln: Complete Documentary Edition, DVD-ROM (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), hereafter cited as LPAL.

³³ Herndon to “Mr. Noyes,” Chiquapin Hill, Illinois, 4 February 1874, Herndon Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

³⁴ Swett to Herndon, Chicago, 17 January 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 165-66.

³⁵ Herndon interviewed by George Alfred Townsend, Springfield correspondence, 25 January, New York Tribune, 15 February 1867.

Thomas H. Ford of Ohio. As Schouler recalled, Lincoln said, in response to a remark by Ford, “‘Now that is like a case of a gentleman I knew in Illinois,’ naming him. ‘He was one of the best lawyers in the Circuit, and knew more stories and could tell them better than any one I ever knew. He was the life of the bar, and did more than any of us to make the dismal nights in a small county-court town pass off pleasantly. But, you know, Ford, when men like him reach a certain age, they change; they either become bad, or they experience religion and become good – better than any of us. My friend experienced religion, and kept the faith strictly to the end. Members of the bar often tried to win him back again into our story-telling circle, but without success, until one night, when we were all in one room, telling our stories again and talking, my friend was at last prevailed upon to tell a story, for telling which he had been celebrated. Great attention was given, and something very good was expected. He told his story, and it was a failure. No one laughed, no one could see the point. He saw himself that his story had failed, and rising, he said, ‘I see you don’t appreciate the story I have told you as formerly; but the fact is, that, as I used to tell it, there were a good deal of vulgar expletives and hard swearing in it, and as I have left all those out, and have only told you the plain story, it has failed to amuse you. The question is, gentlemen, whether the fault is in the story or in you.’”³⁶

Most of Lincoln’s off-color stories have not survived, for after he died, friends were reluctant to tarnish his memory. Abner Y. Ellis recalled that Lincoln “told the Boys Several Storys which drew them after him[.] I remember them but Modesty and my Veneration for his Memory forbids me to relate [them].” Ellis said that it “is Not Strange to Me that Mr L. Should have Such a Great passion For dirty Stories[;] it was his Early training by the Hanks

³⁶ William Schouler, “Political and Personal Recollections, Number Eight” Boston Journal, 18 March 1870. This conversation took place in October 1864. A Washington lawyer, Ford had served as lieutenant governor of Ohio (1856-58) and as colonel of the 32nd Ohio Volunteer Infantry (1861-62).

Boys his Cousins.” Despite his reticence, Ellis did share one story with Herndon: “It appears that Shortly after we had peace with England Mr [Ethan] Allen had occasion to visit England, and while their the English took Great pleasure in teasing him, and trying to Make fun of the Americans and General Washington in particular and one day they got a picture of General Washington, and hung it up the Back House whare Mr Allen Could see it and they finally asked Mr A if he saw that picture of his freind in the Back House. Mr Allen said no. but said he thought that it was a very appropriate [place] for an Englishman to Keep it[.] Why they asked. for said Mr Allen their is Nothing that Will Make an Englishman Shit So quick as the Sight of Genl Washington.”³⁷

Flatulence as well as defecation was the subject of Lincoln stories, one of which revolved around a “man of audacity, quick witted, self-possessed, & equal to all occasions” who was asked to carve a turkey for a large group of party-goers. “The men and women surrounded the table & the audacious man being chosen carver whetted his great carving knife with the steel and got down to business & commenced carving the turkey, but he expended too much force & let a fart – a loud fart so that all the people heard it distinctly. As a matter of course it shocked all terribly. A deep silence reigned. However the audacious man was cool & entirely self possessed; he was curiously & keenly watched by those who knew him well, they suspecting that he would recover in the end and acquit himself with glory. The man with a kind of sublime audacity, pulled off his coat, rolled up his sleeves – put his coat deliberately on a chair – spat on his hands – took his position at the head of the table – picked up the carving knife & whetted it again, never cracking a smile nor moving a muscle of his face. It now became a wonder in the minds of all the men & women how the fellow was to

³⁷ Ellis’s undated statement, enclosed in Ellis to Herndon, 23 January 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 174; Christopher C. Brown, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], ibid., 438.

get out of his dilemma; he squared himself and said loudly & distinctly – ‘Now by God I’ll see if I can’t cut up this turkey without farting.’”³⁸

Another story gives some idea of what caused Lincoln’s auditors to fall about, clutching their sides: “when I was a little boy, I lived in the state of Kentucky, where drunken[n]ess was very com[m]on on election days. At an election . . . in a village near where I lived, on a day when the weather was inclement and the roads exceedingly muddy, a toper named Bill got brutally drunk and staggered down a narrow alley where he layed himself down in the mud, and remained there until the dusk of the evening, at which time he recovered from his stupor. Finding himself very muddy, immediately started for a pump (a public watering place on the street) to wash himself[.] On his way to the pump another drunken man was leaning over a horse post. this, Bill mistook for the pump and at once took hold of the arm of the man for the handle, the use of which set the occupant of the post to throwing up. Bill believing all was right put both hands under and gave himself a thorough washing. He then made his way to the grocery for something to drink. On entering the door one of his comrades exclaimed in a tone of surprise, Why Bill what in the world is the matter[?] Bill said in reply, by G-d you ought to have seen me before I was washed.”³⁹

Lincoln enjoyed telling a story about a fellow “who had a great veneration for Revolutionary relics. He heard that an old lady . . . had a dress which she had worn in the Revolutionary War. He made a special visit to this lady and asked her if she could produce the dress as a satisfaction to his love of aged things. She obliged him by opening a drawer and bringing out the article in question. The enthusiastic person took up this dress and

³⁸ William Herndon, “A Story of Lincoln or a Story which he loved to tell,” Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress, in Zall, ed., Abe Lincoln Laughing, 100-1.

³⁹ John B. Weber to Herndon, Pawnee, Illinois, 5 November 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 396. This story dates back to the eighteenth century. See Zall, Abe Lincoln Laughing, 58-59.

delivered an apostrophe to it. ‘Were you the dress,’ said he, ‘that this lady once young and blooming wore in the time of Washington? No doubt when you came home from the dress maker she kissed you as I do now!’ At this the relic hunter took the old dress and kissed it heartily. The practical old lady rather resented such foolishness over an old piece of wearing apparel and she said: ‘Stranger if you want to kiss something old you had better kiss my ass. It is sixteen years older than that dress.’”⁴⁰ In addition to his skills as a raconteur, Lincoln amused folks in Sangamotown by singing “oald oald Suckey blew Skin” and “the woodpecker stoping on the hollow Beach tree” and “many others that was funny.”⁴¹

At Sangamotown, Lincoln won respect not only for his story-telling prowess and singing but also for his resourcefulness during a crisis that occurred after his flatboat was launched. Its builders had fashioned a canoe, which two young men commandeered. In the high, swift water the frail vessel capsized, putting the occupants in grave danger. Lincoln shouted, telling them to swim to a nearby tree and await help, which they did. Lincoln mounted a log while several others held a rope attached to him, which he used to bring the men safely ashore.⁴²

In late April 1831, Lincoln, Hanks, Johnston, and Offutt loaded their flatboat with bacon, pork, and corn, and floated down the Sangamon River toward New Orleans.⁴³ Years later, Lincoln said that he had “acted both as engineer and engine” on that trip.⁴⁴ After proceeding a short distance, the boat ran aground on a milldam at the village of New Salem,

⁴⁰ Scrapbook, pp. 45, 47, George Alfred Townsend Papers, Library of Congress. In 1878 this was told to Townsend by John Palmer Usher, who had originally heard Lincoln tell it in Paris, Illinois, around 1844.

⁴¹ Caleb Carman to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 30 November 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 429.

⁴² John E. Roll’s reminiscences, Chicago Times Herald, 25 August 1895; Tarbell, Early Life of Lincoln, 106-8.

⁴³ Lincoln’s autobiography written for John Lock Scripps, [ca. June 1860], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:63-64.

⁴⁴ Springfield correspondence, 4 September, New York Evening Post, 8 September 1860.

whose inhabitants watched curiously as the crew struggled to free their craft. Lincoln “made a rather Singular grotesque appearance” when he “jumped off the boat bare headed, and bare footed with a coarse homespun shirt the Sleeves rolled up to his elbows and coarse homespun Pants. (Jeans or Linsey Woolsey) and these rolled up nearly to his knees, often combing his dark bushy hair with his fingers.”⁴⁵ Lincoln took charge of the rescue effort, transferring the cargo to another vessel and borrowing an auger to drill a hole in the bow of their flatboat, which hung precariously over the dam. After the water had drained out, he plugged the hole and the crew continued their journey.⁴⁶ Struck by Lincoln’s ingenuity, Offutt declared that he would have a steamboat built to navigate the Sangamon, and “by thunder, she’d have to go” because Lincoln would be its captain.⁴⁷

A few miles below New Salem the boat stopped to load some hogs, which balked when the crew tried to herd them aboard. Corn was strewn on the gangplank, but the pigs’ “ordinary greed was not equal to their distrust, and they refused to appreciate the food, or follow the corn on board.”⁴⁸ Offutt (in Lincoln’s words) “conceived the whim that he could sew up their eyes and drive them where he pleased.” (Lincoln said: “I Can’t sew the Eyes up,” and was assigned the task of holding “the head of hogs whilst Offutt did so up their

⁴⁵ Henry Onstot witnessed this scene. Onstot quoted in Erastus Wright to Josiah G. Holland, Springfield, 10 July 1865, Holland Papers, New York Public Library. Cf. Erastus Wright’s manuscript journal, 1867, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. For a biographical sketch of Onstot, see McKenzie, “A Demographic Study of Select New Salem Precinct Residents,” 191-97.

⁴⁶ William G. Greene to Herndon (interview), Elm Wood, Illinois, 30 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 17; John Hanks to Herndon (interview), Chicago, 13 June 1865, *ibid.*, 44; William T. Baker, quoted in Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 125; reminiscences of R. Johnson Onstott, Bloomington, Illinois, Pantagraph, 6 February 1909.

⁴⁷ Coleman Smoot to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 7 May 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 254.

⁴⁸ Mark W. Delahay, “Abraham Lincoln,” pamphlet (New York: Daniel H. Newhall, 1939), unpaginated. Delahay may well have heard this story from Lincoln, with whom he was friendly. Jesse W. Weik, The Real Lincoln: A Portrait, ed. Michael Burlingame (1922; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 221-26.

Eyes.”)⁴⁹ Offutt then “put his hands, including A[braham] at the job, which they completed – all but the driving.” Because they were blinded, the pigs “could not be driven out of the lot or field they were in.” Instead, they “followed each other round in a continuous circuit to a chorus of their own peculiar and delightful music.” Finally “they were tied and hauled on carts to the boat.”⁵⁰

When the boat reached Beardstown, Johnston and Hanks “went on a spree,” prompting Lincoln to abandon the venture. Offutt, however, tracked him down and persuaded him to continue the trip.⁵¹ The journey was otherwise uneventful. Occasionally the strange-looking vessel, with its unorthodox sail of plank and cloth, provoked laughter as it drifted along.⁵²

In New Orleans, Lincoln once again observed slavery first-hand and was as appalled as he had been two years earlier when he and Allen Gentry visited the Crescent City. John Hanks alleged that he and Lincoln “Saw Negroes Chained – maltreated – whipt & scourged.” Lincoln’s “heart bled,” though he “Said nothing much” and “was silent from feeling – was Sad – looked bad – felt bad – was thoughtful & abstracted.” Hanks averred that “it was on this trip that he formed his opinions of Slavery: it ran its iron in him then & there – May 1831. I have heard him say – often & often.”⁵³ To a Lincoln biographer, Herndon reported

⁴⁹ John Hanks to Herndon (interview), 13 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 44. See also Hanks’s statement, [1865-66], ibid., 457. Mark Delahay asserted that “Lincoln disapproved of the brutal experiment, but could not do otherwise than obey orders.” Delahay, “Lincoln,” unpaginated.

⁵⁰ Autobiography written for John Locke Scripps, [ca. June 1860], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:64; Reep, Lincoln at New Salem, 19; John Hanks’s statement [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 457.

⁵¹ Clawson Lacy in Volney Hickox, “Lincoln at Home,” Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 15 October 1874. Hanks recalled that the crew “rushed through Beardstown in a hurry.” John Hanks statement to Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 457.

⁵² John Hanks statement to Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 457.

⁵³ John Hanks statement to Herndon [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 457.

John Hanks's recollections of the New Orleans episode: "He [Lincoln] saw a slave, a beautiful mulatto girl, sold at auction. She was felt over, pinched, trotted around to show to bidders that said article was sound, etc. Lincoln walked away from the sad, inhuman scene with a deep feeling of unsmotherable hate. . . . John Hanks, who was two or three times examined by me, told me the above facts about the negro girl There is no doubt about this."⁵⁴ Historians view Hanks's assertion with understandable skepticism, since Lincoln stated that Hanks did not accompany him all the way to New Orleans but rather "had turned back from St. Louis."⁵⁵ It is possible that Hanks reported accurately what Lincoln later told him, rather than what he saw with his own eyes. It is also possible that Lincoln's memory was faulty. Herndon alleged that Lincoln often related this story, and it squares with the reminiscences of Allen Gentry's wife about Lincoln's remarks during his first New Orleans trip.⁵⁶ Moreover, Caleb Carman recalled that Lincoln "was opposed to Slavery & said he thought it a curse to the Land."⁵⁷

Throughout this venture, Offutt grew ever more impressed with Lincoln, who in a third-person autobiographical sketch said that the merchant "conce[i]ved a liking for A[braham] and believing he could turn him to account, he contracted with him to act as clerk for him, on his return from New-Orleans, in charge of a store and Mill at New-

⁵⁴ Herndon to Isaac N. Arnold, 21 October 1882, in Arnold, The Life of Abraham Lincoln (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1884), 31n.

⁵⁵ Autobiography written for John Locke Scripps, [ca. June 1860], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:63-64.

⁵⁶ William H. Herndon and Jesse W. Weik, Herndon's Lincoln, ed. Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis (1889; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 60.

⁵⁷ Caleb Carman to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 30 November 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 429

Salem.”⁵⁸ Offutt declared that “Lincoln can do any thing. I really believe he could take the flat-boat back again up the river.”⁵⁹ Lincoln readily accepted the offer, delighted to have a job that required little physical labor and also paid well.⁶⁰ He had dabbled at merchandizing as he and his family moved to Illinois; en route Lincoln sold some notions (needles, pins, pocket knives, eating utensils, and the like) which he had purchased as a speculation just before leaving Indiana.⁶¹ Offutt had dreamed up the plan to establish a New Salem store en route home from Louisiana. Passing through St. Louis, he ordered goods shipped to New Salem and obtained the necessary license.⁶²

NEW SALEM

In late July, Lincoln headed for the village whose inhabitants a few months earlier had smiled at his ungainly appearance while simultaneously admiring his exploits on the milldam.⁶³ Many New Salemites hailed from the Rolling Fork area of Kentucky, near

⁵⁸ Autobiography written for John Locke Scripps, [ca. June 1860], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:64.

⁵⁹ William H. Herndon interview, Springfield correspondence by V[olney] H[ickox], July 1867, Cincinnati Commercial, 25 July 1867.

⁶⁰ William Dean Howells, Life of Abraham Lincoln, ed. Harry E. Pratt (Springfield: Abraham Lincoln Association, 1938, facsimile edition with Lincoln’s emendations in the 1860 edition), 28.

⁶¹ J. Edward Murr, “The Wilderness Years of Abraham Lincoln,” 316-17, unpublished typescript, Murr Papers, DePauw University, Greencastle, Indiana.

⁶² The application to open a store in Sangamon County was approved in Springfield on July 8.

⁶³ Some authorities claim that Lincoln, upon returning from Louisiana, visited his father and stepmother in Coles County. Charles H. Coleman, Abraham Lincoln and Coles County, Illinois (New Brunswick, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1955), 21-23. But in his autobiographical sketch for John Locke Scripps, Lincoln said that while John D. Johnston “went to them,” he (Lincoln) “stopped indefinitely, and, for the first time, as it were, by himself at New-Salem.” Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:64. Lincoln’s meaning is not entirely clear, but if he did accompany Johnston to Coles County, he did not say so. See Benjamin P. Thomas, “The Coles County Lincoln Cabin,” Bulletin of the Abraham Lincoln Association 41 (1935): 3-8.

Lincoln's boyhood home on Knob Creek.⁶⁴ Among them was the older brother of Lincoln's boyhood chum, Austin Gollaher.⁶⁵ With two dozen families, a grain and saw mill, three stores, a saloon (or "grocery," in frontier parlance), and a blacksmith shop, it was considered an important small town.⁶⁶ It functioned as a trading center for residents of Wolf, Sugar Grove, Concord, Sandridge, Little Grove, Athens, Irish Grove, Indian Point, Rock Creek, Clary's Grove, and other nearby settlements.⁶⁷

Conditions were primitive.⁶⁸ A former resident of Irish Grove recalled that New Salem "was settled by Kentuckians, from the Green River country, mostly from Barren and Green counties; they were hardshell forty-gallon Baptists" who "were opposed to Sunday schools, Bible societies, or the payment of any salary to the minister." They devoted Saturdays "entirely to shooting matches and horse racing, diversified a little with cock and dog fights, and it was rare indeed that a Saturday passed that there was no fist fights in Salem." The town "was not without men who had lost an eye, ear or finger in their Kentucky or Salem encounters, and it was said that the women would bet the spinning of so much yarn on the results of approaching fights." On Sundays, it "was by no means a rare thing to see

⁶⁴ Kunigunde Duncan and D. F. Nikols, Mentor Graham: The Man Who Taught Lincoln (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), 84-85. Settlers also came from other parts of Kentucky. Benjamin P. Thomas, Lincoln's New Salem (New York: Knopf, 1954), 12-13.

⁶⁵ Isaac Gullihier moved from Kentucky to New Salem with the family of Isaac Burner in 1829. C. B. McGrew to Fern Nance Pond, Galesburg, Illinois, 17 April 1937, Pond Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁶⁶ Maltby, Life of Lincoln, 26; Thomas, Lincoln's New Salem, 24; T. G. Onstot, Pioneers of Menard and Mason Counties (Forest City, Illinois: Onstot, 1902), 155-56.

⁶⁷ Thomas, Lincoln's New Salem, 13. For a scholarly study of one of these communities, see John Mack Faragher, Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Frontier (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

⁶⁸ Onstot, Pioneers of Menard and Mason Counties, 219-21; Miller, Past and Present of Menard County, 21-31; Richard S. Taylor and Mark L. Johnson, "The Spirit of the Place: Origins of the Movement to Reconstruct Lincoln's New Salem," Journal of Illinois History 7 (2004): 174-200.

bruised faces.”⁶⁹ One day, when a dozen men attempted to pull each other off their horses, one of them protested to Greasy George Miller, “you have torn my shirt.” Greasy George replied, “Yes, and I can tear your hide too.” They then fought, but not according to the prize-fighting regulations then commonly observed, for battles there “had no rules. They were strike, gouge, bite, kick, anyway to win.”⁷⁰ Another New Salemite wrote that the hamlet had been noted for its “rollicking times,” especially on Saturdays, when “a horse race came off . . . a drinking spree followed, perhaps a fight or two, and at night those disposed took a turn at old sledge or poker.”⁷¹ New Salem was “a fast place” where “it was difficult for a young man of ordinary moral courage to resist the temptations that beset him on every hand,” and where “roughs and bullies . . . were in the habit of winning all the money of strangers at cards, & then whipping them in the bargain.”⁷² Among the early settlers of Sangamon County, according to Milton Hay, “the inherent meanness and vice of the human character frequently manifested itself. Some were given to brawls and violence. Some were malicious, and would vent their malice in slandering a neighbor or injuring his property.”⁷³ At the age of thirty-nine, Hugh Armstrong of Clary’s Grove died a fugitive from justice after a “cutting scrape.”⁷⁴

To his family in New Hampshire, Charles James Fox Clarke of New Salem described the village’s cabins, including those of the more prosperous farmers, as “not half so good as

⁶⁹ “Abraham Lincoln’s Early Days,” unidentified clipping, copying an article from the Chicago Inter-Ocean, [spring 1881?], Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana. The unnamed author said he had lived in Irish Grove in the 1830s and visited New Salem to have grain ground and wool carded.

⁷⁰ This scene was witnessed by T. G. Onstot. Onstot, Pioneers of Menard and Mason Counties, 71-72.

⁷¹ Unsigned letter, “on the road from Petersburg,” 4 May, Sangamo Journal, 13 May 1847.

⁷² Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 82; James Short to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 7 July 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 73.

⁷³ Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 21 August 1879.

your old hogs pen and not any larger.”⁷⁵ They were, as the son of an original settler put it, “little in advance of the three-faced camp of the first pioneers.” A staple of the diet was a form of bread called corn dodgers, “so hard that you could knock a Texas steer down with a chunk of it, or split an end board forty yards offhand.”⁷⁶ From central Illinois in 1834, Stephen A. Douglas warned a friend in New York that “persons who have been accustomed to the older and more densely settled States, must expect to experience many inconveniences and perhaps I may add hardships, if they come here.”⁷⁷ The drudgery of housework and child rearing made life especially toilsome for women; an English observer called central Illinois “heaven for men and horses, but a very different place for women and oxen.”⁷⁸ In 1830, a pioneer in nearby Tazewell County confided to a relative: “I pity our women very much. I do not tell them so.”⁷⁹

Because New Salem had no jail or whipping post, local rowdies had little to fear if they misbehaved.⁸⁰ When Baptists immersed true believers in the Sangamon River, toughs would throw logs and animal carcasses from the high bluff and “would run their horses and whoop and yell like wild Indians.” One notable fist fight, observed by the entire community

⁷⁴ Harry E. Pratt and Eugene Boecker, “Residents of New Salem, Illinois, Buried in Menard County Cemeteries,” unpublished typescript, 1940, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁷⁵ Charles James Fox Clarke to his mother, Mrs. Mary Clark, New Salem, 3 August 1834, Clarke Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁷⁶ Onstot, Pioneers of Menard and Mason Counties, 219, 157.

⁷⁷ Stephen A. Douglas to Julius N. Granger, Jacksonville, 11 March 1834, Robert W. Johannsen, ed., The Letters of Stephen A. Douglas (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961), 5.

⁷⁸ Sarah M. Worthington, “Stories of Pioneer Mothers in Illinois,” manuscript, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, quoted in Faragher, Sugar Creek, 114. In the 1840s, Margaret Fuller observed that women on Illinois farms “found themselves confined to a comfortless and laborious life” while “their husbands and brothers enjoyed the country in hunting and fishing.” Margaret Fuller, Summer on the Lakes, 117, quoted *ibid.*, 154. The hardships of frontier farm women in central Illinois are described *ibid.*, 101, 110-18, 154-55, 205-9, 230-33.

⁷⁹ William Brown to Jeremiah Brown, Jr., Dillon, Illinois, 20 April 1830, typed copy, Jesse W. Fell Papers, Library of Congress.

⁸⁰ Duncan and Nikols, Mentor Graham, 122-24; Thomas, Lincoln’s New Salem, 48.

from the bluff, led to the death of a pugilist.⁸¹ The most notorious bullies, the Clary's Grove boys, were "emphatically wild and rough, and were the terror of all those who did not belong to the company."⁸² A member of that gang, Thomas S. Edwards, recalled that "We had hard knuckles and hot blood."⁸³ (In 1833, Edwards was indicted for riot and rape. One Sally Marshal alleged that he entered her house one night, threw his coat on the floor, and said "that he would do as he pleased with her . . . he would throw her down there and would fuck her . . . and her Husband should stand and see it.")⁸⁴ Edwards boasted that "we could give tough knocks and take em, without ither whining or bearing malice. Ef bad blood was bred at a raising or a shooting match, it was middlin sure to be spilt afore sundown We always felt like knocking off somebody's hat, or tramping on somebody's moccasins."⁸⁵ They drank, fought, and "would do almost anything for sport or fun, love or necessity."⁸⁶ Among other pranks, they "trimmed the manes and tails of horses, cut bridles so that but a little remained to brake at the first pull, gut girths," and "put stones under saddles so as to cause riders to be thrown when mounting."⁸⁷

⁸¹ Onstot, Pioneers of Menard and Mason Counties, 122, 133-34.

⁸² James Short to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 7 July 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 73; John Todd Stuart, interview with James Q. Howard, [May 1860], copy in John G. Nicolay's hand, John Hay Papers, Brown University. See also Wayne C. Temple, ed., "Lincoln and the Burners at New Salem," Lincoln Herald 67 (1965): 68.

⁸³ Thomas S. Edwards, interviewed by John Hay, September 1860, Michael Burlingame, ed., Lincoln's Journalist: John Hay's Anonymous Writings for the Press, 1860-1864 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 10.

⁸⁴ Faragher, Sugar Creek, 112-13. Lincoln signed as a surety on Edwards's recognizance bond. See People v. Edwards et al., and People v. Edwards and Edwards, LPAL, case files # 04236 and # 04235.

⁸⁵ Edwards, interviewed by John Hay, September 1860, Burlingame, ed., Lincoln's Journalist, 10.

⁸⁶ Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Lincoln, 63.

⁸⁷ Henry Hoheimer, interview with Herndon, [7 March 1887], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 604; Murray Goff, president of the Old Settler's Association of Menard County, quoted by J. W. S., Chicago Tribune, n.d., copied in the Petersburg Observer, 23 August 1884.

Religious practices in New Salem resembled the ones Lincoln had witnessed in Indiana.⁸⁸ Many preachers “made up in loud hallooing and violent action what they lacked in information.”⁸⁹ In 1835, Charles James Fox Clarke reported from New Salem that “Our preaching is scarce and far between. There are no settled ministers except in the large towns such as county seats &c. All the preaching we hear is from traveling ministers, such as the free will baptist, iron jacket baptist, Cumberland Presbyterians, Methodists Campbelites &c.”⁹⁰

Gander pulling was so popular that a field was set aside for that activity. A New Salemite told how the contestants “would tie an old gander’s feet together and tie him to a swaying limb up high enough for a man to reach up and get hold of his head as he hung down.” They “would grease his neck up as far as a man could ge[t] hold, grease it good. Then the man was to get back, ride his horse at a run under the limb and reach up as he went by and grab the gander by the head and undertake to jerk his head off.” If successful, he won the bird.⁹¹

Drunkenness was common, even among children.⁹² In 1832, Dr. John Allen deemed New Salem “a notoriously wicked and intemperate place.”⁹³ A decade later, Lincoln recalled

⁸⁸ On frontier Illinois preachers and religious practices, see Faragher, Sugar Creek, 160-70.

⁸⁹ Thomas Ford, The History of Illinois from Its Commencement as a State in 1818 to 1847, ed. Milo Milton Quaife (2 vols.; Chicago: Lakeside Press, 1945-46), 1:38-40; Thomas, Lincoln’s New Salem, 41, 40, 54.

⁹⁰ Charles James Fox Clarke to Hollis J. Clarke, New Salem, 15 March 1835, photocopy, Clarke Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁹¹ Reminiscences of John Watkins, paraphrased by Thomas P. Reep, based on an interview conducted by Reep in 1890, in Reep’s interview with Joseph F. Booton, Petersburg, Illinois, 18 October 1934, typescript, p. 17, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁹² Duncan and Nikols, Mentor Graham, 122-24; Thomas, Lincoln’s New Salem, 48; R. Carlyle Buley, The Old Northwest: Pioneer Period, 1815-1840 (2 vols.; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1950), 1:370-71; James E. Davis, Frontier Illinois (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 329-30; Faragher, Sugar Creek, 151-52.

⁹³ Allen to Eleazar Baldwin, New Salem, 5 May 1832, typed copy in the New Salem Museum, copied in “John Allen Residence,” p. 31, typescript in the Sangamon Valley Collection, Lincoln Library, Springfield.

that when he and his contemporaries were growing up, “we found intoxicating liquor, recognized by every body, and repudiated by nobody. It commonly entered into the first draught of the infant, and the last draught of the dying man. From the sideboard of the parson, down to the ragged pocket of the homeless loafer, it was constantly found. Physicians prescribed it in this, that, and the other disease. Government provided it for its soldiers and sailors; and to have a rolling or raising, a husking or hoe-down, any where without it, was positively insufferable.”⁹⁴ Some New Englanders in the village, led by the pious Dr. Allen, tried to civilize it by establishing a temperance society. (According to New Salem tradition, Lincoln once said, pointing to Allen: “There stands the man who, years ago, was instrumental in convincing me of the evils of trafficking in and using ardent spirits. I am glad that I ever saw him. I am glad that I ever heard his testimony on this terrible subject.”)⁹⁵ When the local schoolmaster joined Allen’s group, he was expelled from the Baptist church, whose fundamentalist congregants regarded membership in such a society as an unwarranted distraction from God’s work.⁹⁶ When the same congregation subsequently dismissed a member for drunkenness, a perplexed fellow, brandishing a whiskey flask, asked for clarification: “Brethering, it seems to me that you are not [con]sistent because you have turned out one man for taking the [temperance] pledge and another for getting drunk. Now, brethering, how much of this critter have I got to drink to have good standing among you?”⁹⁷ In 1834, a temperance advocate in New Salem lamented that his cause “has been much the

⁹⁴ Temperance Address, delivered in Springfield, 22 February 1842, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:274.

⁹⁵ Miller, Past and Present of Menard County, 43. See also Reep, Lincoln at New Salem, 111.

⁹⁶ John McNamar to Herndon, Menard County, Illinois, 20 January 1867, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 546.

⁹⁷ Onstot, Pioneers of Menard and Mason Counties, 121.

theme of ridicule.”⁹⁸ A year later, one villager reported that the “temperance cause is progressing slowly in this country although there is much opposition to contend with.”⁹⁹

During his New Salem years, Lincoln would, according to a fellow townsman, take “a drink if he wanted it, like any one else,” though he was “not a drinking man.”¹⁰⁰ Caleb Carman, who knew Lincoln in New Salem, recalled that he “took his dram with me when he felt like it – not often.”¹⁰¹ But in his twenty-ninth year, he formally pledged “never to drink ardent spirits.” On January 19, 1838, several months after he had moved from New Salem to Springfield, Lincoln joined 185 other men in signing the constitution of the Sangamon County Temperance Society, whose secretary was his good friend Simeon Francis, editor of the Sangamo Journal, Springfield’s Whig newspaper.¹⁰² It was no great sacrifice on Lincoln’s part, for, as he told a friend, alcohol “is unpleasant to me and always makes me feel flabby and undone. . . . I hate the stuff. . . . I claim no credit for being a temperance man.”¹⁰³ When inveigled into tasting beer, he became sick and said “that’s absolutely the vilest stuff I ever

⁹⁸ Thomas J. Nance, speech of 26 February 1834, Fern Nance Pond, ed., “New Salem Community Activities: Documents,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 48 (1955): 95.

⁹⁹ Charles James Fox Clarke to Hollis J. Clarke, New Salem, 15 March 1835, photocopy, Clarke Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

¹⁰⁰ An unidentified former resident of New Salem, interviewed by Octavia Roberts, in Roberts, “We All Knew Abr’ham,” Abraham Lincoln Quarterly 4 (1946): 20.

¹⁰¹ Carman, interview with Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 12 October 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 373. For a thoughtful, well documented discussion of Lincoln’s drinking habits, see Temple, The Taste is in My Mouth a Little, 64-94.

¹⁰² The constitution was in the hands of J. S. Francis, a descendant of Simeon Francis. Unidentified newspaper clipping, Abraham Lincoln Association reference files, “Temperance” folder, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. See also History of Sangamon County, Illinois (Chicago: Inter-State Publishing Company, 1881), 298; Thomas Dale Logan, “Lincoln, the Early Temperance Reformer,” The Christian Century, 13 February 1909, 152. In 1846 and 1847, Lincoln attended meetings of the Sangamon County Temperance Union. Minutes of the Union, 31 August 1846 and 28 June 1847, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. The word Sangamo was probably derived from the Algonquin saginawa, meaning “river’s mouth.” Faragher, Sugar Creek, 74-75.

¹⁰³ Herndon to Weik, Springfield, 5 February 1887, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress; Herndon to Isaac N. Arnold, Springfield, 24 October 1883, Lincoln Collection, Chicago History Museum.

put to my lips. I'd as soon drink slop."¹⁰⁴ In 1842, he concluded a temperance lecture by declaring his belief that "such of us as have never fallen victims [to alcoholism], have been spared more from the absence of appetite, than from any mental or moral superiority over those who have."¹⁰⁵ Lincoln not only disliked the taste of alcohol but he also "hated drunkenness."¹⁰⁶

Like other western settlements, New Salem lacked a rigid social hierarchy. As Stephen A. Douglas reported from central Illinois in 1835, "here equality and equal rights prevail. And no man acknowledges another his superior unless his talents, his principles and his good conduct entitle him to that distinction."¹⁰⁷

STOREKEEPER

In the summer of 1831, as he settled in New Salem, Lincoln thought of himself as "a sort of floating Drift wood" swept along by the floods that inundated the region after the "winter of the deep snow."¹⁰⁸ Because neither Offutt nor his goods had arrived, Lincoln had

¹⁰⁴ Lincoln said this to Lawrence Weldon, who told the story to R. E. Williams, who in turn told it to the Rev. Mr. E. D. Jones. Bloomington, Illinois, Pantagraph, 6 February 1909. According to one source, "at a hotel one day many years before he became president, a Mr. Whitney proposed a toast all around and Lincoln was badgered into drinking some lager, which made him ill." Belleville, Illinois, Advocate, 28 June 1866. Caleb Carman recalled that Lincoln's "friends forced him to drink Sometimes and possibly he never would have touched it but for his friends." Carman, interview with Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 12 October 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 374-75. Once while practicing law on the circuit, "Lincoln was induced by friends who were indulging a little, to taste lager beer. He took only a bare sip and spit that out with fearful grimaces declaring it was worthless stuff." John M. Scott, "Lincoln on the Stump and at the Bar," Ida M. Tarbell Papers. Allegheny College.

¹⁰⁵ Address to the Washington Temperance Society in Springfield, 22 February 1842, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:278.

¹⁰⁶ David Davis, interview with Herndon, 20 September 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 350.

¹⁰⁷ Douglas to Gehazi Granger, Jacksonville, 9 November 1835, Johannsen, ed., Letters of Douglas, 21.

¹⁰⁸ "He used to say to the boys & young men that they might always know when he came to New Salem by the high water the Spring after the deep Snow that he came down with it as a kind 'drift wood.'" Lynn McNulty

to postpone his debut as a merchant.¹⁰⁹ He continued working as a riverman, piloting a small boat to Beardstown for Dr. David P. Nelson, who was taking his wife (“intellectually a Colossus compared to her husband”) and family to Texas.¹¹⁰ The trip was challenging, for the river overflowed its banks, and Lincoln sometimes “ran about three miles out in the Prairie.”¹¹¹ At Beardstown, he awaited the arrival of Offutt’s merchandise, which was to be transported to New Salem by a fellow named Potter. When Potter asked how he would recognize Lincoln, Offutt replied: “You can’t mistake him; he’s as long as a beanpole, and as awkward as he is long.”¹¹²

With nothing much to do after this brief expedition, he “rapidly made acquaintances and friends.”¹¹³ Among them was Mentor Graham, a schoolteacher who on August 1, an election day, was clerking at the polls when Lincoln entered to vote for the pro-Henry-Clay candidate for Congress, an unpopular choice in that heavily Democratic precinct.¹¹⁴ In need

Greene to Herndon, Avon, Illinois, 30 July 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 80. Green’s brother William said in 1865 that “Mr Lincoln last June told me how to guide myself as to the date of his coming to our part of then Sangamon Co which was this that he came down the Sangamon River as a sort of floating Drift wood on the great freshit produced in the thawing of that snow.” William G. Greene to Herndon, Tallula, Illinois, 29 May 1865, ibid., 12.

¹⁰⁹ When his mother died on February 21, Offutt was compelled to return to Kentucky to help settle the estate. Townsend, Lincoln and the Bluegrass, 37.

¹¹⁰ John McNamar to Herndon, Menard County, Illinois, 4 June 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 259; Illustrated Atlas Map of Menard County, Illinois (n.p.: W. R. Brink, 1874), 11.

¹¹¹ James Short to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 7 July 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 73; John McNamar to Herndon, Menard County, Illinois, 4 June 1866, ibid., 259.

¹¹² Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 79-80.

¹¹³ Autobiography written for John Locke Scripps, [ca. June 1860], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:64.

¹¹⁴ The congressional candidate receiving Lincoln’s vote was James Turney, a pro-Clay candidate from Green County, who won few 77 of the ballots cast in Sangamon County; in the Clary’s Grove precinct, where Lincoln voted, Joseph Duncan, then a strong supporter of Jackson, outpolled Turney 136 to 52. Pease, ed., Illinois Election Returns, 72-73; Lincoln Lore, no. 17 (5 August 1929); Springfield correspondence, 24 February, St. Louis Globe-Democrat, 25 February 1894. Based on the 1836 vote in New Salem, Mark Neely, Jr., argued that “New Salem was solidly Whig.” Neely, “The Political Life of New Salem, Illinois,” Lincoln Lore, no. 1715 (January 1981), 3. But as Kenneth J. Winkle observed, “voting figures for New Salem have survived for only three years – 1832, 1836, and 1838. In both 1832 and 1838, New Salem was heavily Democratic. The precinct’s support for [Hugh] White [in 1836] can therefore properly be interpreted as a temporary defection of southern

of an assistant, Graham asked the rangy newcomer if he could write. “I can make a few rabbit tracks,” Lincoln replied.¹¹⁵ Graham pressed him into service and later testified that he “performed the duties with great facility – much fairness and honesty & impartially.”¹¹⁶ During lulls, the assistant regaled his colleagues and voters with jokes and stories, much to their delight.¹¹⁷ Royal A. Clary recalled that he “was humorous – witty & good natured & that geniality drew him into our notice So quick.”¹¹⁸ He had a knack for friendship; as his companion George Close put it, “Lincoln had nothing only plenty of friends.”¹¹⁹

The following month, Offutt rented a log storehouse where he and Lincoln opened shop, dispensing coffee, tea, gunpowder, liquor, and tobacco, among other commodities.¹²⁰ To help his clerk, who received \$25 per month plus board, Offutt hired two assistants, Charles Maltby and William G. Greene.¹²¹ Born in Tennessee nineteen years earlier, Greene

Democrats opposed to Van Buren rather than a reflection of underlying, long-term Whig sympathies.” Kenneth J. Winkle, The Young Eagle: The Rise of Abraham Lincoln (Dallas: Taylor, 2001), 339n16. Lincoln stated that Jackson beat Clay in 1832 by 115 votes in New Salem. Autobiography written for John L. Scripps, [ca. June 1860], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:64. In 1834, Joseph Duncan, who had turned against Jackson between 1832 and 1834, received 64 votes at the New Salem polls while his fervently pro-Jackson Democratic opponent, William C. Kinney, won 150. The Democratic candidate for Congress, William L. May, received 185 votes and his opponent, Benjamin Mills, only 70. Sangamon County Commissioners, Court Records, New Salem Poll Books, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

¹¹⁵ Reep, Lincoln at New Salem, 21.

¹¹⁶ Mentor Graham to Herndon (interview), Petersburg, Illinois, 29 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 8-9. Abram S. Bergen, not Lincoln, is listed in the records as the clerk at the polls that day; Lincoln probably assisted him and Graham. Springfield correspondence, 24 February, St. Louis Globe-Democrat, 25 February 1894.

¹¹⁷ Reep, Lincoln at New Salem, 20-21.

¹¹⁸ Royal Clary, interview with Herndon, [October 1866?], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 370.

¹¹⁹ Close, interview with James Q. Howard, [May 1860], Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. See also Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 15 January 1886, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

¹²⁰ On Offutt’s store, see Winkle, The Young Eagle, 50-55.

¹²¹ Maltby, Lincoln, 26-30; William G. Greene to Herndon (interview), Elm Wood, Illinois, 30 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 17-18; James Short to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 7 July 1865, ibid., 74. Curiously, historians (with a few exceptions, including Douglas L. Wilson, Wayne C. Temple, Kenneth J. Winkle, and Lawrence B. Stringer) have ignored Maltby’s recollections of Lincoln. Surprisingly, Harry E. Pratt, a most astute Lincoln scholar, dismissed Maltby’s reminiscences: “The account of Charles Maltby’s relationship with Lincoln [in his biography of the sixteenth president] seems to me to be largely an old

was, in the estimation of Clark E. Carr, “very droll, very queer, and withal entertaining, – the best story-teller I have ever met.”¹²² He later became a highly successful businessman.¹²³ The young men slept at the store and took their meals at Bowling Green’s home, three-quarters of a mile from the village.¹²⁴ Greene, whose main duty was to assess applicants for credit, thought Lincoln “an attentive – Kind – generous & accommodating Clerk” and recalled that he and Lincoln “slept on the same cott & when one turned over the other had to do likewise.”¹²⁵ Jesse Baker recollected that the “new clerk in the Salem Store drew much attention from the very first. His striking, awkward, and generally peculiar appearance advertised the store round about and drew many customers, who never quit trading there as long as young Abe Lincoln clerked in the establishment. He gave good weight; he was chock full of accommodation, and he wasn’t a ‘smart Aleck.’”¹²⁶ Henry McHenry called Lincoln “a

man’s dream.” Harry E. Pratt to Edgar Rich, Boston, 2 December 1938, copy, research files of the Abraham Lincoln Association, folder “Historical Data, K-N,” Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. But in 1863, Lincoln told a journalist, “I know Maltby, for I slept with him six months.” Washington correspondence, 8 April, San Francisco Bulletin, 15 May 1863. As president, Lincoln appointed Maltby internal revenue collector for the fifth district of California, even though he told Noah Brooks: “I never thought M[altby] had any more than average ability when we were young men together But, then, I suppose he thought just the same about me.” Michael Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed: Civil War Dispatches of Noah Brooks (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 204. Maltby visited Washington in late 1864 and early 1865, when he saw the president on occasion. Maltby, Lincoln, 278-80, 290-93; Brooks, Washington, D.C., in Lincoln’s Time, ed. Herbert Mitgang (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1971), 69-70.

¹²² Clark E. Carr, The Illini: A Story of the Prairies (9th ed.; Chicago: McClurg, 1920), 48.

¹²³ On Greene (1812-94), see John R. Williams, Biographical Sketch of the Life of William G. Greene of Menard County, Illinois (Philadelphia: W. R. Brink, 1874), and McKenzie, “A Demographic Study of Select New Salem Precinct Residents,” 62-66.

¹²⁴ Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 85; William G. Greene to Herndon (interview), Elm Wood, Illinois, 30 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 17-18.

¹²⁵ William G. Greene to Herndon (interview), Elm Wood, Illinois, 30 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 18. Because much business was done on credit, Offutt wanted someone who knew the folks in the New Salem area, where Greene lived, to help Lincoln make those decisions. “Lincoln, being a stranger and unacquainted with the financial standing of the people in the community, Offutt set about, as William G. Green, in an interview, once told the writer, to find a likely lad who knew the people well and whom he could employ without too much expense, to stay at the store and, ‘Tell Lincoln who was good.’” Reep, Lincoln at New Salem, 23. It was common for frontier merchants to extend credit to two-thirds of their customers. Winkle, The Young Eagle, 54.

good – obliging clerk & an honest one” who “increased Offutts business much by his simplicity” and his “open – Candid – obliging & honest” character; everyone “loved him.”¹²⁷ Mentor Graham concurred, telling an interviewer that Lincoln “was among the best clerks I ever saw: he was attentive to his business – was kind and considerate to his customers & friends and always treated them with great tenderness – kindness & honesty.”¹²⁸

Lincoln’s integrity was especially appealing to women, who liked to do business with him, “for they believed that he was honest and would tell them the truth about the goods.”¹²⁹ Mrs. Hannah Armstrong recalled that when she initially met Lincoln at the store, “I liked him first rate” because “he was so pleasant and kind.”¹³⁰ One woman bought a dress for which she paid \$2.37½. Later that day, Lincoln realized that he had overcharged her 6¼¢, which he that evening refunded to her. Another woman asked for a pound of tea, which he measured out on a scale inadvertently using the half-pound weight rather than the pound weight. When he realized that he had given her only half of what she paid for, he promptly went to her

¹²⁶ “Stories of Lincoln, Reminiscences Missed by His Biographers Gathered in the ‘Old Salem’ Region,” unidentified clipping, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana. In the late 1820s, Jesse Baker (b. 1798) migrated from his native Tennessee and settled on Baker’s Prairie in Sangamon County. In 1833, he moved to a farm site near the village of Kilbourne in Mason County. Robert D. Miller, Past and Present of Menard County, Illinois (Chicago: Clarke, 1905), 89; Joseph Cochrane, Centennial History of Mason County (Springfield: Rommaker, 1876), 226-27. In that same year, Lincoln wrote a deed for Baker and his wife. Thirteen years later, Baker was a defendant in a case where Lincoln represented the plaintiff. See LPAL, case files # 05025 and # 00401 (Wagoner & Wagoner v. Wagoner et al.)

¹²⁷ Henry McHenry to Herndon (interview), Petersburg, Illinois, 29 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 14.

¹²⁸ Mentor Graham, interview with Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 29 May 1865, ibid., 9.

¹²⁹ Harvey Lee Ross, Lincoln’s First Years in Illinois, ed. Rufus Rockwell Wilson (Elmira, N.Y.: Primavera Press, 1946), 5.

¹³⁰ Havana correspondence, 14 December 1865, Chicago Republican, n.d., copied in the Belleville Advocate, 5 January 1866.

home and gave her another half-pound of tea. These episodes earned him the sobriquet “Honest Abe.”¹³¹

Lincoln was not always agreeable. One day he took offense at Harvey Lee Ross, who asked to see some gloves. Lincoln showed him a pair that he identified as made of dogskin. When Ross asked how he knew they were dogskin, Lincoln, somewhat “rasped” at the challenging tone of the question, replied: “I will tell you how I know they are dogskin gloves. Jack Clary’s dog killed Tom Watkins’ sheep, and Tom Watkins’ boy killed the dog, and old John Mounts tanned the dogskin, and Sally Spears made the gloves, and that is how I know they are dogskin gloves.”¹³² Lincoln took umbrage at another customer, Charlie Reavis, who used profane language around women. When Reavis ignored admonitions to stop, Lincoln accosted him, saying: “I have spoken to you a number of times about swearing in this store in the presence of ladies and you have not heeded. Now I am going to rub the lesson in so that you will not forget again.” Thereupon Lincoln grabbed Reavis’s arm, hustled him out of the store, threw him to the ground, and rubbed smart weed in his face.¹³³

The responsibilities of Lincoln, Maltby, and Greene expanded when Offutt rented the flour and saw mills whose dam had earlier obstructed the progress of his flatboat. Those mills, “being the only ones within an area of twenty miles, brought much custom and trade to the store, and being under the supervision of the clerks they added much to their labors and duties.”¹³⁴ Lincoln helped “to unload Sacks of wheat from farmers wagons, measure out and

¹³¹ William H. Herndon, interviewed by a correspondent of the Methodist, unidentified clipping, dated May 1865, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

¹³² Ross, Lincoln’s First Years in Illinois, 5.

¹³³ Reep, Lincoln at New Salem, 55.

¹³⁴ Maltby, Lincoln, 26.

settle with them for the same.”¹³⁵ Offutt also kept Lincoln busy splitting rails and constructing a pen for one thousand hogs.¹³⁶

Despite their added responsibilities, the clerks enjoyed a fair amount of leisure time. A biographer whose main informant was William G. Greene wrote that the “course of business at New Salem in Lincoln’s day was for the farmers to send their boys to mill at all times except Sunday, but they themselves reserved and set apart Saturday to visit town – to do their little trading, give and receive gossip – indulge in scrub racing, cock-fighting, rowdyings – getting drunk &c: consequently the little village would be replete with excitement, animation, bustle and business during Saturday, but would be stagnant during the rest of the week: and, in consequence, Lincoln could devote most of his time at the mill, receiving grists – taking tolls, loading and tying up sacks &c. while Greene attended to the hum-drum business of the little store on the hill.”¹³⁷ Maltby recollected that the “business in the store being mostly with country traders, was transacted between the hours of 9 A.M. and 3 P.M., giving several hours in the day in which one of the clerks could perform all the duties required in the store.” In his spare time, “Lincoln frequently would, for an hour at the close of the day, engage in athletic sports, such as wrestling, jumping, pitching quoits [flat stones] or heavy weights and similar exercises.”¹³⁸ With his very long legs, he was especially successful in jumping contests.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Jason Duncan to Herndon, [late 1866-early 1867], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 539.

¹³⁶ Mentor Graham to Herndon (interview), Petersburg, Illinois, 29 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 9.

¹³⁷ Henry C. Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, manuscript, p. 110, Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee. The quoted passage does not appear in the published version of Whitney’s biography.

¹³⁸ Maltby, Lincoln, 26.

¹³⁹ Reminiscences of William B. Thompson, in Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 8.

Unlike William G. Greene, Lincoln did not gamble; indeed, he urged Greene to give up that vice.¹⁴⁰ Greene, however, had an importunate creditor: “I’m ninety cents behind, and I can’t quit till I’ve won it back,” he protested.

Lincoln replied: “Billy, if you will promise that you will never gamble again, I’ll put up a job that will beat him.”

Greene promised, “if you will only help me get ahead of him, I swear it.”

“‘Well,’ said Lincoln, ‘when he comes into the store again, you bet him one of those seven dollar hats that I can drink out of a full whisky barrel.’”

Greene took the advice and won the wager when Lincoln “squatted down and lifted the one end of the barrel on one knee, and then lifted the other end on the other knee, and, stooping over, actually succeeded in taking a drink out of the bunghole, which, however, he immediately spat out.” Once freed from debt, Greene quit gambling.¹⁴¹

Offutt, who also liked to wager, bet rival store-keeper Bill Clary \$5 that his tall clerk could outwrestle any challenger, including the leader of the Clary’s Grove boys, Jack Armstrong.¹⁴² (Offutt reportedly had won \$50 in New Orleans betting that Lincoln could lift

¹⁴⁰ Henry McHenry to Herndon (interview), Petersburg, 29 May 1865; James Short to Herndon, Petersburg, 7 July 1865; William G. Greene to Herndon, Tallula, Illinois, 27 November 1865; Caleb Carman, interview with Herndon, Petersburg, 12 October 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 15, 73, 142, 374.

¹⁴¹ Greene interviewed by Adolph Bristol, Tallula, Illinois, correspondence, 29 October, Chicago Inter-Ocean, 4 November 1876; George Kirby paraphrased in Paul Hull, “Another Lincoln Tale,” New York Mail and Express, 1 February 1896, p. 11; Greene, interviewed by George A. Pierce, correspondence dated “on the cars,” 12 April, Chicago Inter-Ocean, 30 April 1881; Greene to Herndon, 11 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 33; Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 85-86; William Makepeace Thayer, The Pioneer Boy and How He Became President (Boston: Walker, Wise, 1863), 249-53.

¹⁴² James Short to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 7 July 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 73; Lynn McNulty Greene to Herndon, Avon, Illinois, 30 July 1865, ibid., 80; Robert B. Rutledge to Herndon, [ca. 1 November 1866], ibid., 386; John Purkapile, interviewed in Volney Hickox, “Lincoln at Home,” Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 15 October 1874. Accounts of Lincoln’s epic wrestling match are analyzed thoroughly and convincingly in Wilson, Honor’s Voice, 19-51.

1000 pounds.)¹⁴³ As a member of that band later recalled, he and his colleagues “haw-hawed at this a little, but thought it was some of Dent’s ‘wind,’ for Dent could lie like a peddler But Jack Armstrong, the pride of our settlement, him that we used to call Salem’s Glory, tough as whit-leather, and wiry as a wild-cat, the man that had never been thrown, and we believed never could be thrown, commenced talking back at Dent, saying that his bones was aching with nothing but strength, that he had been laying about long enough, and would like a good freshener of a wrestle fust-rate.”¹⁴⁴ Lincoln did not share Armstrong’s enthusiasm; Offutt’s proposition, according to Henry C. Whitney, “greatly annoyed” him, for “he abhorred personal conflict, or anything that savored of ill-feeling. He had gained the goodwill of everybody in that little community, and deprecated aught that would disturb the entente cordiale.” Lincoln “could see no utility in the contest proposed, and his whole soul rebelled against it.”¹⁴⁵ Rather than fight, Lincoln sought to act as a peacemaker. Russell Godbey of New Salem testified that “When a fight was on hand Abe would S[a]y to me – Let[’]s go and break up the Row with a laugh & we generally did it.”¹⁴⁶ Back in Indiana, he had allegedly settled a bitter quarrel between two neighbors disputing the ownership of a

¹⁴³ John Purkapile, interviewed in Volney Hickox, “Lincoln at Home,” Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 15 October 1874. For a biographical sketch of Purkapile, see McKenzie, “A Demographic Study of Select New Salem Precinct Residents,” 152-53.

¹⁴⁴ Thomas S. Edwards, interviewed by John Hay, September 1860, Burlingame, ed., Lincoln’s Journalist, 10.

¹⁴⁵ Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 82; Lamon, Lincoln, 92. A similar story is told of Lincoln’s reluctance to fight a Hoosier who challenged him. C. B. Seeley to C. M. Olin, Napa, California, 23 March, Vincennes, Indiana, Sun, 28 June 1930.

¹⁴⁶ Russell Godbey, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 450. Isaac Cogdal recalled that “Salem was a great place for fighting and Lincoln was called the Peace Maker: he always interfered.” Isaac Cogdal, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 440. Rowan Herndon reported to his cousin William Herndon that while in New Salem, Lincoln “Never Quareled or fought But always was the Pease maker.” Rowan Herndon to William Herndon, Quincy, Illinois, 28 May 1865, ibid., 7. On the prevalence of fighting in frontier Illinois, see Faragher, Sugar Creek, 152-53.

goose.¹⁴⁷ But Lincoln had little choice when thus challenged, for, as a historian from Kentucky put it, “courage was an absolute necessity” on the frontier: “To brand a man as a coward was equal to ostracism. He might as well leave the community. It was necessary for him to fight if he was challenged or if the occasion arose. The fact that he was defeated in a personal combat did not detract from his courage if he fought well. But a lack of physical courage was a degradation from which none could recover in a frontier town or community.”¹⁴⁸

So occurred the fabled wrestling match, a rite of passage for newcomers to the region where the Clary’s Grove boys “took it upon themselves to try the mettle of every new comer and ascertain what sort of stuff he was made of.”¹⁴⁹ Armstrong and Lincoln grappled before a large crowd near Offutt’s store. “Square built, muscular and strong as an ox,” Armstrong was a formidable opponent.¹⁵⁰ One New Salemite called him “a regular bully,” “very stout,” and “tricky in wrestling.”¹⁵¹ But Lincoln “was a good deal taller and could bend over Jack.” After a long while, it looked as if Lincoln might prevail, at which point Bill Clary shouted out: “Throw him anyway, Jack.” Armstrong, in violation of the rules of wrestling, employed a hold that was legitimate only in scuffling and instantly threw Lincoln, who “got up pretty

¹⁴⁷ Murr, “Wilderness Years of Abraham Lincoln,” 300-3; Murr, “Some Pertinent Observations Concerning ‘Abe Lincoln – The Hoosier,’” 11-12. Murr’s informants were Joseph Gentry, James Gentry, and Wesley Hall, each of whom he interviewed separately.

¹⁴⁸ William E. Connelley to Albert J. Beveridge, Topeka, Kansas, 21 January 1925, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress. See also Elliott J. Gorn, “‘Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch’: The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry,” American Historical Review 90 (1985): 18-43. In 1837, Ralph Waldo Emerson remarked: “The Southerner asks concerning any man, ‘How does he fight?’ The Northerner asks, ‘What can he do?’” Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes, eds., Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1836-1838 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1910), 4:275 (entry for 9 August 1837).

¹⁴⁹ John Todd Stuart, interview with James Q. Howard, [May 1860], copy in the hand of John G. Nicolay, John Hay Papers, Brown University.

¹⁵⁰ Robert B. Rutledge to Herndon, [ca. 1 November 1866], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 386.

¹⁵¹ James Short to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 7 July 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 73.

mad. He didn't say much, but he told somebody that if it ever came right, he would give Bill Clary a good licking."¹⁵² At that point, a general fight nearly broke out, but Lincoln, "unda[u]nted & fearless," managed to quell the threat.¹⁵³ This episode "was the turning point in Lincoln's life," according to his friend, mentor, and first law partner, John Todd Stuart.¹⁵⁴ The newcomer's courage, strength, and his good-natured willingness to accept Armstrong's violation of the rules impressed not only the Clary's Grove boys (especially Armstrong, who became his fast friend and admirer), but also the general population, which respected his behavior in that memorable contest. The popularity and respect thus gained became the foundation of his political career.

The Clary's Grove boys honored Lincoln by inviting him to referee their horse races. When Henry McHenry persuaded Lincoln to act as one of two judges for a race, his counterpart afterward declared: "Lincoln is the fairest man I ever had to deal with. If Lincoln is in the County when I die I want him to be my adm[inistrato]r, for he is the only man I ever met with that was whol[ly] & purely and unselfishly honest."¹⁵⁵ Lincoln also refereed cock fights, including a contest between roosters owned by Babb McNabb and Tom Watkins.

¹⁵² Reminiscences of Uncle Johnny Potter, Washington correspondence by Walter B. Stevens, 17 December, St. Louis Globe-Democrat, 20 December 1888. For a biographical sketch of Clary, see McKenzie, "A Demographic Study of Select New Salem Precinct Residents," 181-83. As a youngster, John Potter (1808-1900), the son of Royal and Rebecca Revis Potter, moved to Illinois with his family; they eventually settled in northern Sangamon County (an area which in 1839 became Menard County). A farmer, Potter in 1830 married Cassander Elmore, with whom he had eleven children. Unidentified clipping, Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee. Douglas L. Wilson, after a careful and thorough analysis of the many accounts of this episode, deems Potter's account one of the most trustworthy. Wilson persuasively argues that Lincoln did not retaliate against Armstrong by grabbing him with a choke-hold, despite what many biographers have asserted. Wilson, Honor's Voice, 35-37. See also the account of the match by George Kirby, who was nineteen years old when he observed the match and who described that event to Paul Hull in 1894. Hull, "Lincoln as a Wrestler," New York Mail and Express, 11 January 1896.

¹⁵³ John M. Rutledge to Herndon, Birmingham, Iowa, 18 November 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 402.

¹⁵⁴ Stuart's interview with James Q. Howard, [May 1860], copy in John G. Nicolay's hand, John Hay Papers, Brown University.

¹⁵⁵ Henry McHenry, interview with Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 29 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 14.

When Lincoln threw the two birds into the cockpit, McNabb's shunned the challenge, whereupon its owner "jumped down into the pit and grabbed hold of his rooster and threw him up in the air over his shoulder." The cowardly bird landed on a wood pile, where he "stuck his head up and crowed very loudly, and flapped his wings." McNabb said, "Yes, you little cuss, you are great on dress parade, but you ain't worth a damn in a fight." (During the Civil War, Lincoln immortalized this episode when he likened General George B. McClellan to McNabb's rooster.)¹⁵⁶

The Clary's Grove boys supported Lincoln at election time as long as he lived in New Salem. (When he ran for Congress from Springfield, however, they voted against him.)¹⁵⁷ In those days, such support was vital, for, as Illinois Governor Thomas Ford explained, the "candidate who had the 'butcher knife boys' on his side was almost certain to be elected" in many of the state's precincts.¹⁵⁸ That Lincoln could win the admiration and good will of the Clary's Grove boys without sharing their enthusiasm for drinking, gander pulling, and other favorite pastimes was a tribute to his remarkable capacity for friendship.¹⁵⁹

SELF-EDUCATION

¹⁵⁶ Reminiscences of John Watkins, paraphrased by Thomas P. Reep, based on an interview conducted by Reep in 1890, in Reep's interview with Joseph F. Booton, Petersburg, Illinois, 18 October 1934, typescript, pp. 19-21, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield; Reep, Reep, Lincoln at New Salem, 71-72. Abner Ellis gave Herndon a similar account. Ellis to Herndon, Moro, Illinois, 1 February 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 187-88.

¹⁵⁷ Petersburg poll book, 3 August 1846, New Salem Lincoln Collection, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

¹⁵⁸ Thomas Ford, History of Illinois from Its Commencement as a State in 1818 to 1847, ed. Rodney O. Davis (1854; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 57.

¹⁵⁹ Recollections of Hawkins Taylor, Gate City (Keokuk, Iowa), n.d., copied in The National View, 11 June 1887, clipping, John G. Nicolay Papers, Library of Congress; J. McCan Davis, "Lincoln as a Storekeeper," Los Angeles Times, 30 June 1895. Abner Y. Ellis recalled that "Salem in thos[e] days was a hard place for a temperate young Man like Mr Lincoln was and I have often wondered how he could be so ex[t]remely popular and not drink and Carouse with them." Ellis, statement for Herndon, enclosed in Ellis to Herndon, Moro, Illinois, 23 January 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 170.

To fit himself for a political career would be Lincoln's chief preoccupation during the five and a half years he spent in New Salem. His fellow clerk, Charles Maltby, recalled that Lincoln "realized that he had difficulties and obstacles to overcome With a limited education, without means and influential friends to assist him, he was impressed with the reality that, in his case, the eminence of popularity and fame must be reached by his own efforts, industry and perseverance; and with a laudable ambition he had the confidence in his resources and abilities that if properly directed he would succeed." Lincoln often studied at night, as Maltby testified. The two men closed the store around 7 p.m., after which they would now and then spend time "with some family or young people in the village, and those occasional visits or calls were seasons of mutual pleasure and gratification. Lincoln's humorous fund of anecdotes and stories made him a welcome visitor at all times." But most evenings, Maltby remembered, "were, from 8 to 11 o'clock, employed by Lincoln in reading and study; a short time then was spent in reviewing the reading of the evening, and then blankets were spread upon the counter and the inmates retired to rest on their hard couch, which prepared them for the labors and duties of the coming day."¹⁶⁰

At first, Lincoln concentrated on mastering English grammar, an indispensable accomplishment for aspiring politicians. In an 1860 autobiographical sketch, written in the third person, he stated: "After he was twentythree, and had separated from his father, he studied English grammar, imperfectly of course, but so as to speak and write as well as he now does."¹⁶¹ He did not want to write or talk like an uneducated bumpkin.

¹⁶⁰ Maltby, Lincoln, 28, 27.

¹⁶¹ Autobiography written for John L. Scripps, [ca. June 1860], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:62.

(Even after his rigorous course of study, traces of his primitive background remained. In the 1850s, Lincoln still had a Kentucky accent.¹⁶² In his 1846 poem, “The Bear Hunt,” he rhymed “skin” with “again.”¹⁶³ Lincoln pronounced “only” as “unly” and “one” as “own.”¹⁶⁴ During his 1858 debates with Stephen A. Douglas, Lincoln asked, “Ain’t Hitt here?”¹⁶⁵ In 1860, he began his celebrated Cooper Union speech by saying, “Mr. Cheerman.”¹⁶⁶ The following year, a journalist quoted the following words from the newly inaugurated president: “I’ve heern of you often” and “you must know these fellers.”¹⁶⁷ Assistant presidential secretary John Hay said Lincoln during the Civil War uttered the words “hear” and “year” with a “marked Southwestern pronunciation.”¹⁶⁸ (In 1861, Lincoln reportedly said: “I heered of that.”)¹⁶⁹ Also as president he said “feenance” for “finance,” “waal” for “well,” “thar” for “there,” “was” for “were,” “git” for “get,” “ye” for “you,” “rare” for “rear,” and “one on ‘em” for “one of them.” George Templeton Strong, who recorded most of these Hoosierisms, called the president’s grammar “weak” and deemed him “a barbarian, Scythian, yahoo, or gorilla, in respect of outside polish.” Strong heard Lincoln say, “me and the

¹⁶² Horace White, “Abraham Lincoln in 1854,” Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society, 1908 (Springfield: Illinois State Journal, 1909), 32.

¹⁶³ “The Bear Hunt,” [6 September 1846?], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:389: “And swells as if his skin would tear,/And growls and shakes again;/And swears, as plain as dog can swear,/That he has won the skin.”

¹⁶⁴ Statement of Charles E. Capen, Bloomington, Illinois, 9 January 1923, William E. Barton Papers, University of Chicago.

¹⁶⁵ Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 74.

¹⁶⁶ Noah Brooks, Abraham Lincoln and the Downfall of American Slavery (New York: Putnam’s, 1894), 186. Brooks quotes an unidentified source who attended the speech.

¹⁶⁷ Cincinnati Daily Enquirer, 6 March 1861.

¹⁶⁸ John Hay, “Life in the White House in the Time of Lincoln,” Century Magazine 41 (November 1890), in Michael Burlingame, ed., At Lincoln’s Side: John Hay’s Civil War Correspondence and Selected Writings (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 138.

¹⁶⁹ Frederick Law Olmsted to Mary Perkins Olmsted, Washington, 19 October 1861, Jane Turner Censer, ed., The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Vol. 4: Defending the Union, The Civil War and the U. S. Sanitary Commission, 1861-1863 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 213.

Attorney-General's very chicken-hearted!"¹⁷⁰ In 1861, General George B. McClellan described the efforts of a magician at the White House: "The most striking feature of the performance was that the Magician asked the Presdt for his handkerchief – upon which that dignitary replied promptly, 'You've got me now, I ain't got any'!!!!"¹⁷¹ Henry C. Whitney remembered the president saying of a supposed relative, "She ain't my cousin, but she thinks she is."¹⁷² Whitney also heard him refer to cannons as "cannings," pronounce the verb "do" as if it were the noun "dew," say "jest" when he meant "just," and regularly greet his friends in court with a jocular: "Ain't you glad to see me?" or "Ain't you glad I come?"¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ George S. Coe's recollections in E. J. Edwards, "President Lincoln and 'Fee-nance,'" St. Louis Globe-Democrat, 27 May 1910; E. D. Keyes, Fifty Years' Observations of Men and Events, Civil and Military (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1884), 383; George Templeton Strong, Diary of the Civil War, 1860-1865, ed. Allan Nevins (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 188, 204 (entries for 23 October 1861 and 29 January 1862). Strong admired Lincoln as "a most sensible, straightforward, honest old codger," whose "evident integrity and simplicity of purpose would compensate for worse grammar than his, and for even more intense provincialism and rusticity." Ibid., 204-5.

¹⁷¹ George B. McClellan to Mary Ellen McClellan, Washington, 21 November 1861, Stephen W. Sears, ed., The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan: Selected Correspondence, 1860-1865 (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1989), 137.

¹⁷² Whitney, Life on the Circuit with Lincoln, ed. Paul M. Angle (1892; Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1940), 46.

¹⁷³ Whitney, statement for Herndon [November 1866?], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 405; Whitney, Life on the Circuit, ed. Angle, 183, 185, 405, 438. One Hoosier reported that Lincoln said "Marthy" instead of "Martha" and that he "would say 'ain't' and 'hain't,' 'red up the bed' instead of 'make the bed,' . . . 'they don't do that no more,' and 'airy' and 'nairy' for 'any' and 'none.'" Judge John L. Niblack, quoted in Wayne Guthrie, "Lincoln Revealed Hoosier Traits," Indianapolis News, 10 February 1964. Niblack grew up in southwestern Indiana and spoke with people who had known Lincoln or whose parents had known him. In 1832, Lincoln may also have said, in the "disagreeable nasal tone and drawling whine" characteristic of antebellum Indiana speech, "outen" for "out of," "keer" for "care," "tuck" for "took," "kum" for "came," "whar" for "where," "knowed" for "known," "hisself" for "himself," "larn" for "learn," "yearn" for "earn," "kin" for "can," "leettle" for "little," "ruther" for "rather," "ax" for "ask," "Chewsday" for "Tuesday," "hoss" for "horse," "war" for "was," "to-morry" for "tomorrow," "ef" for "if," "crick" for "creek," "gin" for "give," "arter" for "after," "purty" for "pretty," "foller" for "follow," "jest" for "just," "fit" for "fought," "Injeanny" for "Indiana," "ort" for "ought," "mout" for "might," "obleeged" for "obliged," "shuck" for "shook," "bekase" for "because," and "sot" for "sit," "set," or "sat." He may also have used "young uns," "over yander," "hornswoggled," and other frontier locutions deriving from the peasant speech of the eighteenth century. J. Richard Beste, The Wabash: Adventures of an English Gentleman's Family in the Interior of America. . . . (London, 1855), 1:280, quoted in Buley, Old Northwest, 1:354n; Edward Eggleston, The Hoosier Schoolmaster (New York: Macmillan, 1928), passim; Beveridge, Lincoln, 1:53-54; Charles F. Remy to Beveridge, Indianapolis, 3 October 1924, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress. Cf. James M. Bergquist, "Tracing the Origins of a Midwestern Culture: The Case of Central Indiana," Indiana Magazine of History 77 (1981): 1-32; Robert F. Dakin, "South Midland Speech in the Old Northwest," Journal of English Linguistics 5 (1971): 31-48; Marvin D. Carmony, "Indiana Dialects in their Historical Setting," Indiana Folklore 2 (January 1997); Timothy C. Frazer, Midland Illinois Dialect Patterns (Publication no. 73 of the American Dialect Society; University,

According to William G. Greene, shortly after Lincoln began clerking, “he took a notion to study grammar.” Greene alleged that he retrieved some grammar books from his home and lent them to Lincoln, who studied “privately in his store – worked it out by himself alone . . . though others may have explained special problems – rules & such like things which he could not Easily Master.”¹⁷⁴ Greene himself offered little help. He told a journalist that Lincoln “committed to memory a whole grammar, and I used to just hold the book to see

Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1987); Edward Everett Dale, “The Speech of the Pioneers,” Arkansas Historical Quarterly 6 (1947): 117-31; and Meredith Nicholson, The Hoosiers (New York: Macmillan, 1900), 45-62. Edward Eggleston explained that the Hoosier dialect was purest in the “the pocket,” i.e., the extreme southwest corner of Indiana, where Lincoln grew up: “It is in the back counties, off the lines of travel, in what are called the hoop-pole counties in the ‘pocket,’ as the S. W. corner is called, that the Hoosier grows to perfection.” Eggleston, “The Hoosiers and the Hoosier Language,” quoted in William Randel, Edward Eggleston (New York: Twayne, 1963), 96. The Hoosier dialect was not unique to Indiana; it was, rather, a mid-western phenomenon, most heavily influenced by Southern Appalachian speech patterns. Buley, Old Northwest, 1:350-58.

¹⁷⁴ William G. Greene to Herndon (interview), Elm Wood, Illinois, 30 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 18. It is possible that Greene, who was something of an exaggerator, did not supply Lincoln with books. James Short said that “Wm. G. Greene’s father’s name was William. Think he had no books or surveyor’s instruments. He was a drinking & illiterate man. If Mr L got any books it was from Bowling Greene, who was a reading man.” James Short to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 7 July 1865, ibid., 74. Greene in 1881 claimed that he did teach Lincoln grammar, though briefly: “You never could teach Lincoln for a great while. I began with him, but in three weeks he knew more of the English grammar than I did, seeing and remembering every word he read without effort.” Greene alleged that Lincoln introduced him to members of his cabinet as his “grammar master.” Greene, interview with George A. Pierce, dispatch dated “on the cars,” 15 April, Chicago Inter Ocean, 16 April 1881. At the age of eighty, Greene claimed that he had lent Lincoln grammar books by both Kirkham and Lindley Murray and “in six weeks he knew five times as much about grammar as I did.” Dallas correspondence, 25 May, New York Sun, 31 May 1891. Thomas Reep, who interviewed Greene, said that during the Civil War, “while Green was internal revenue collector for the Peoria district, he was called to Washington by Lincoln. Being admitted to Lincoln’s office, he found Mr. Seward . . . present. Lincoln, after saluting and shaking hands with him, turned to Seward and said, ‘Seward, shake hands with “Bill” Green of Illinois, the man who taught me grammar.’ This statement embarrassed Green who himself knew little about grammar and in whose conversation grammatical rules were not always adhered to, so that he did not engage in the conversation for fear Seward would notice his deficiencies and wonder at Lincoln’s statement. Seward soon left, and when he had passed out of hearing, Green turned to Lincoln and said, ‘Abe, what did you mean by telling Seward that I taught you grammar? Lord knows I didn’t know any grammar myself, – much less could I have taught you.’ And that Lincoln replied, ‘Bill, don’t you recollect when we stayed in the Offutt store in New Salem, that you would hold the book and see if I could give the correct definitions and accurate answers to the questions?’ Then he (Green) said, ‘Yes, Abe, I remember that, but that was not teaching you grammar.’ And that Abe replied, ‘Bill, that was all the teaching of grammar I ever had.’” Reep, Lincoln at New Salem, 30-31. A. W. Drake, an artist at the Century Magazine, warned that Greene’s testimony was unreliable. “From all accounts that I have heard of him he seems to be considered not very reliable in his statements. One who is familiar with the whole subject and knows Mr. Green (and who is a reliable man) writes me as follows: Privately. ‘Green is well an egregious exaggerator – not a liar – loves to blow off – is a good jolly fellow.’” Drake to John Hay, n.p., 12 August 1886, Nicolay-Hay Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Drake’s informant was probably William H. Herndon, who called Greene “a good man but a blow – an exaggerator. In his dealings, etc., he is called ‘Slippery Bill.’ All this is true and yet I like the man.” Herndon to Ward Hill Lamon, Springfield, 25 February 1870, Lamon Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

that he didn't miss any words when he recited it. I want to tell you that when he got through with that grammar he knew more grammar than the man who made the book."¹⁷⁵

It is not clear who provided Lincoln with a copy of Kirkham's book. The village schoolteacher, Mentor Graham, alleged that Lincoln told him one day: "I had a notion of studying grammar." Graham replied: "If you Ever Expect to go before the public in any Capacity I think it the best thing you can do." Eager to get started, Lincoln mused, "If I had a grammar I would Commence now." Curiously, Graham did not himself possess such a volume; but, he said, "I know of a grammar at . . . [John] Vance[']s." Lincoln promptly walked several miles to Vance's house, obtained a copy of Samuel Kirkham's English Grammar in Familiar Lectures, and "then turned his immediate & almost undivided attention to English grammar."¹⁷⁶ At first, Lincoln needed help, for, as he said, Kirkham "was a puzzler at the start, with its four, five, and six headed rules, about as complicated to beginners as the Longer Catechism and the Thirty-nine Articles to young ministers."¹⁷⁷ One of those who may have helped Lincoln was Greene's brother, Lynn, who said Lincoln "got possession of one of Kirkham's Grammars & began studying it on the hill sides of old Salem." Greene, who had attended Illinois College, spent several days "giving him instruction."¹⁷⁸ In 1862, Lincoln told Jonathan Baldwin Turner, who served on the faculty of

¹⁷⁵ William G. Greene interviewed by Paul Hull, "Another Lincoln Tale," New York Mail and Express, 1 February 1896, p. 11.

¹⁷⁶ Graham to Herndon (interview), Petersburg, Illinois, 29 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 10. See also Graham's interview with James Q. Howard, [May 1860], Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. One source claimed that Lincoln studied Ann Rutledge's copy of Kirkham. "Abraham Lincoln," Illinois Woman's Columbian Club of Menard County, Menard, Salem, Lincoln Souvenir Album (Petersburg, Illinois: Pantagraph, 1893), unpaginated. Another source alleged that Lincoln borrowed Kirkham's grammar from Isaac Onstott of New Salem. Reminiscences of R. Johnson Onstott, Bloomington, Illinois, Pantagraph, 6 February 1909.

¹⁷⁷ Robert H. Browne, Abraham Lincoln and the Men of His Time, 2 vols. (Cincinnati: Jennings and Pye, 1901), 1:158-59.

¹⁷⁸ L. M. Greene to Herndon, 30 July 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 80; L. M. Greene, interview with James Q. Howard, [May 1860], Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. Henry C. Whitney, who

Illinois College from 1833 to 1848, that “his only instruction in the English language had been from me, through the Green brothers of Tallula, Illinois, while they were students at Illinois College and he was a hired hand working for their mother in the harvest-fields.”¹⁷⁹ (A resident of New Salem called Kirkham’s “the hardest grammar, I think that anybody ever studied.”¹⁸⁰ In his 1860 campaign biography of Lincoln, William Dean Howells referred to Kirkham’s book as “dry,” “meager,” and “sententious.”)¹⁸¹ According to Charles Maltby, while studying this grammar, Lincoln “often remarked ‘that it was very dry reading, but that he would master the general principles,’ which he did; but his correct mastery of the language was acquired more from reading and writing than from study.”¹⁸² Another helpmate for Lincoln was Dr. Jason Duncan, who modestly stated that “Abraham requested me to assist him in the study of English Grammer, which I consented to do to the extent of my limited ability.” Lincoln’s rapid progress amazed Duncan: “his application through the winter [of 1831-32] was assiduous, and untiring, his intuitive faculties were Surprising. He seemed to master the construction of the english language and apply the rules of the same in a most astonishing manner.”¹⁸³ His progress was indeed remarkably swift; he obtained a “fair practical knowledge” of the subject within three weeks.¹⁸⁴

interviewed William G. Greene, wrote that Lincoln borrowed Lindley Murray’s grammar from his brother Lynn. Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 87. Charles Maltby asserted that “[s]oon after he [Lincoln] entered the store he procured Murray’s Grammar.” Maltby, Lincoln, 27. In the fall of 1834, Greene entered Illinois College in Jacksonville.

¹⁷⁹ J. B. Turner to his wife, Washington, 19 September 1862, in Mary Turner Carriel, The Life of Jonathan Baldwin Turner (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961), 250-51.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Nancy Rutledge Prewitt, conducted by Margaret Flindt, Fairfield, Iowa, correspondence, 10 February, Chicago Inter-Ocean, 12 February 1899.

¹⁸¹ Howells, Life of Lincoln, ed. Pratt, 29.

¹⁸² Maltby, Lincoln, 31.

¹⁸³ Jason Duncan to Herndon, [late 1866-early 1867], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 539.

¹⁸⁴ Howells, Life of Lincoln, ed. Pratt, 29.

Mentor Graham could not fairly claim much credit for teaching grammar to Lincoln, who said that he “studied with nobody.”¹⁸⁵ Nor could William G. Greene.¹⁸⁶ Maltby asserted that Lincoln “had no teachers, few books and no learned and intellectual companions.”¹⁸⁷ (For companionship with fellow students, he occasionally participated in Friday afternoon spelling bees at the local school.)¹⁸⁸ Greene, who maintained that “after he came to New Salem . . . he was self Taught,” acknowledged that Lincoln “seemed to master it, as it were, by intuition.”¹⁸⁹ Greene’s brother Lynn said Lincoln read “every thing he could get hold of. What was difficult to most persons seemed open to him.”¹⁹⁰ Robert B. Rutledge observed that Lincoln “never appeared to be a hard student as he seemed to Master his studies with little effort.”¹⁹¹

In New Salem, Lincoln became a bookworm. Maltby recalled that though he occasionally indulged in sports and games, those “were never allowed to interfere with his duties or studies. He had early resolved that his leisure hours must be chiefly devoted to the acquirement of practical knowledge and useful information. Naturally of a jovial and merry temperament in his youth, it was remarkable that he only, on special occasions, spent any

¹⁸⁵ Autobiography written for John Locke Scripps, [ca. June 1860], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:65.

¹⁸⁶ William G. Greene’s role in Lincoln’s education was probably limited. John Hill said of Greene and Mentor Graham that their claims about educating Lincoln “were not born out by their ability to do so. . . . [I] Was intimate with both and have no doubt, but that Graham knew more of books than Mr. Green.” Hill to Ida M. Tarbell, Columbus, Georgia, 17 February 1896, Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

¹⁸⁷ Maltby, Lincoln, 41. Daniel Green Burner asserted that Charles Maltby was his teacher, but Maltby made no such claim in his biography of Lincoln. Temple, ed., “Lincoln and the Burners,” 67.

¹⁸⁸ Recollections of Thomas Watkins, on whose farm the school was located, “Abraham Lincoln,” in Illinois Woman’s Columbian Club of Menard County, Menard, Salem, Lincoln Souvenir Album (Petersburg, Illinois: Pantagraph, 1893), unpaginated.

¹⁸⁹ Thayer, Pioneer Boy, 243; William G. Greene to Herndon, 7 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 26.

¹⁹⁰ L. M. Greene, interview with James Q. Howard, [May 1860], Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁹¹ Robert B. Rutledge to Herndon, 30 November 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 426.

evenings in social amusements or entertainments, and in this resolution he was immovable, and no prospect or promise of pleasure could draw him from the hours devoted to his books and the course and means he had adopted to obtain practical and useful knowledge.”¹⁹²

Nancy Rutledge remembered seeing Lincoln often “walking along studying” Kirkham’s Grammar, “apparently engrossed in study, pick up my youngest brother [Robert], tuck him under one long arm, and with the book in the other hand plod along unconcernedly repeating rules, and Robert yelling and kicking vigorously. After a while Mr. Lincoln would pretend that he had just discovered that he had a boy under his arm, walking off with him.”¹⁹³

Robert Rutledge himself testified that Lincoln spent almost every spare moment studying: “While clerking for Offatt[,] as Post Master or in the pursuit of any avocation, [if] An opportunity would offer, he would apply himself to his studies, if it was but five minutes time, would open his book, which he always kept at hand, & study, close it recite to himself, then entertain company or wait on a Customer in the Store or post office apparently without any inte[r]ruption. When passing from business to boarding house for meals, he could usually be seen with his book under his arm, or open in his hand reading as he walked.”

Rutledge observed him reading while “walking the streets, occasionally become absorbed with his book, would stop & stand a few moments, then walk on, or pass from one house in the town to another, or from one crowd or squad of men to another, apparently seeking amusement with his book under his arm, when the company or amusement became dry or irksome, he would open his book & commune with it for a time, then return it to its usual resting place, and entertain his audience.”¹⁹⁴ While staying with the family of the cooper

¹⁹² Maltby, Lincoln, 34.

¹⁹³ Interview with Nancy Rutledge Prewitt, conducted by Margaret Flindt, Fairfield, Iowa, correspondence, 10 February, Chicago Inter-Ocean, 12 February 1899.

¹⁹⁴ Robert B. Rutledge to Herndon, 30 November and 4 December 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 426, 498.

Henry Onstot, Lincoln would read in a chair by the fireplace after work; when Mrs. Onstot, busy preparing supper, complained that he was in her way, he replied: “Just step over me, Susan.” Following the meal, he “would stretch his long body in front of the fire place” and resume reading.¹⁹⁵ Others in New Salem had similar recollections.¹⁹⁶

For a time, Lincoln was especially fond of history books. According to J. Rowan Herndon, “he read all of history that he Could Get hold of,” borrowing books on the subject from Bennett Abell, Samuel Hill, and John McNamar.¹⁹⁷ Among the historical volumes he perused was Amos Blanchard’s American Military Biography, which he read “a great deal.”¹⁹⁸ He also enjoyed Edward Gibbon’s Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire and Charles Rollin’s Ancient History of the Egyptians, Carthaginians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes and Persians, Macedonians and Grecians.¹⁹⁹ In time, however, Lincoln grew disenchanted with history and biography. John Todd Stuart declared that Lincoln “didn’t

¹⁹⁵ Sue E. Onstot to James R. B. Van Cleave, Forest City, Illinois, 17 March 1909, Harry E. Pratt Papers, University of Illinois; reminiscences of R. Johnson Onstott, Bloomington, Illinois, Pantagraph, 6 February 1909.

¹⁹⁶ J. Rowan Herndon remembered that Lincoln often “would walk Down to the River Reading” and “would Return the same way.” J. Rowan Herndon to Herndon, 16 August 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 92. For a while, Lincoln lived with Caleb Carman, who said that “he was studying law a[l]ways with his book in his Hands walking out or across the street.” Carman to Osborn H. Oldroyd, Petersburg, Illinois, 2 April 1882, Carman Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield; Carman, interview with Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 12 October 1866, ibid., 373. The first time Mentor Graham beheld Lincoln, “he was lying on a trundle bed rocking a cradle with his foot – was almost covered with papers and books.” Lincoln, he recollected, “studied & practiced” Kirkham’s volume assiduously. “I have taught in my life four or six thousand people as School Master,” Graham observed, “and no one ever surpassed him in rapidly – quickly & well acquiring the rudiments & rules of English grammar.” Graham’s interview with James Q. Howard, [May 1860], Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Graham to Herndon (interview), Petersburg, Illinois, 29 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 10. On another occasion, Graham asserted that “Lincoln was the most studious, diligent straight forward young man in the pursuit of knowledge of literature than any among the five thousand I have taught in the scho[ol.]” Mentor Graham to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 15 July 1865, ibid., 76.

¹⁹⁷ J. Rowan Herndon to William H. Herndon, Quincy, Illinois, 16 April 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 91.

¹⁹⁸ N. W. Branson to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 3 August 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 90.

¹⁹⁹ William G. Greene, interview with Herndon, Elm Wood, Illinois, 30 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 21; Dennis Hanks to Herndon, Charleston, Illinois, 12 March 1866, ibid., 229.

know anything about history – had no faith in it nor biography.”²⁰⁰ Joseph Gillespie recalled that “Lincoln never I think studied history in connection with politics with the exception of the history of the Netherlands and of the revolutions of 1640 & 1688 in England and of our revolutionary struggle.” He “regarded it as of trifling value as ‘teaching by example’” and “thought that history as generally written was altogether to[o] unreliable.”²⁰¹ Herndon reported that Lincoln “had a contempt for all history and biography.”²⁰² When Herndon recommended a biography of Edmund Burke, Lincoln replied: “No, I don’t want to read it. Biographies as written are false and misleading. The author of the life of his hero paints him as a perfect man – magnifies his perfections and suppresses his imperfections – describes the success of his hero in glowing terms, never once hinting at his failures and his blunders.”²⁰³

As he had done in Indiana, Lincoln continued to devour newspapers avidly, like many another frontier merchant.²⁰⁴ Maltby remembered that the St. Louis Republican and Louisville Journal “were then the leading newspapers published in the West, and their weekly visit[s] to Lincoln were of special interest. The latter was his favorite, as he was in accord with its politics and had a special relish for its sparkling wit and humor.”²⁰⁵ George Close said Lincoln’s “favorite paper was the ‘Louisville Journal,’ which he for many years studied – and paid for when he had not money enough to dress decently.”²⁰⁶ Lincoln also

²⁰⁰ Stuart, interview with Herndon, 20 December 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 519.

²⁰¹ Gillespie to Herndon, Edwardsville, Illinois, 8 December 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 509.

²⁰² Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Chicago, 2 January 1887, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁰³ Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, February 1887, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁰⁴ Lewis E. Atherton, The Pioneer Merchant in Mid-America (Columbia: University of Missouri, University of Missouri Studies, 14 [1939]): 20-21.

²⁰⁵ Maltby, Lincoln, 28.

²⁰⁶ Close, interview with James Q. Howard, [May 1860], Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. See also William G. Greene, interview with Herndon, Elm Wood, Illinois, 30 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 20.

habitually read the Sangamo Journal, a Whig paper published in nearby Springfield.²⁰⁷

Mentor Graham reported that as early as 1832, Lincoln subscribed to the Journal, which became his political “text book.”²⁰⁸

Of the literature he perused in New Salem, Lincoln especially enjoyed the plays of Shakespeare and the poetry of Burns, Cowper, Gray, Pope, and Byron. In Byron’s poetry, Lincoln evidently found congenial the juxtaposition of brooding gloom and rollicking humor.²⁰⁹ He prized highly Pope’s “Essay on Man,” particularly the following verses:

All nature is but art, unknown to thee;

All chance, direction, which thou canst not see;

All discord, harmony not understood;

All partial evil, universal good;

And, spite of pride, in erring treason’s spite,

One truth is clear, whatever is, is right.²¹⁰

Robert Burns was Lincoln’s favorite.²¹¹ Maltby remembered that after studying hard for two or three hours, Lincoln would relax and “take up Burns’ poems, which he read much and admired greatly. He read with that hilarity which usually was so peculiar to him, some of the most humorous productions of that versatile poet, his favorite selections being Tom

²⁰⁷ N. W. Branson to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 3 August 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 90; J. Rowan Herndon to William Herndon, Quincy, Illinois, 16 August 1865, ibid., 92.

²⁰⁸ Mentor Graham, interview with Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 29 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 10. According to J. Rowan Herndon, Lincoln liked to read newspapers by day and history books by night. J. Rowan Herndon to William H. Herndon, Quincy, Illinois, 16 August 1865, ibid., 92

²⁰⁹ Wilson, Honor’s Voice, 190-93. He allegedly could recite from memory several pages of “The Corsair” by Byron. Egbert L. Viele, interviewed by William A. Croffut, unidentified clipping with penciled date 23 September 1885, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

²¹⁰ George Tuthill Borrett, Letters from Canada and the United States (London: J. E. Adlard, 1865), 254-55 (letter dated “on board the Kangaroo,” November 1864).

²¹¹ A. G. McKnight, “Lincoln and Burns,” pamphlet reprinted from the Order of the Scottish Clans Courier, January-February 1943, J. G. Randall Papers, Library of Congress.

O’Shanter, Address to the Dial, Highland Mary, Bonny Jeane and Dr. Hornbrook. Having a very retentive memory he soon became familiar with these poems and many others; and his frequent quotations from them indicated the humorous inclination of his mind in his early life.” At times, however, “his countenance and actions indicated more serious thoughts, and memory was busy with incidents of his boyhood days.” Then he “would read the Cotter’s Saturday Night, or Gray’s Elegy, or one of Cowper’s poems.” Much as he enjoyed poems, savoring them “was subordinate to his general studies. He often said that he only read them as a relish or dessert after taking the more solid and substantial food.”²¹² Lincoln memorized Burns’s “Tam O’Shanter,” “Holy Willie’s Prayer,” “Epistle to a Young Friend,” and “The Cotter’s Saturday Night,” which he recited with a Scottish accent.²¹³ He once remarked: “Burns never touched a sentiment without carrying it to its ultimate expression and leaving nothing further to be said.”²¹⁴ Lincoln may well have identified with Burns, a poor farm boy who grew up loathing the drudgery and ignorance of rural life; who wrote satirical verse; who cherished friends, before whom he would tell stories and recite poetry; who suffered from depression; and who carried a book with him to read whenever he could.²¹⁵ Lincoln might have also seen parallels between New Salem and the sites of Burns’s poems. A New Salemite thought “The Cotter’s Saturday night” would “describe many a prairie Cabin out here.”²¹⁶

²¹² Maltby, Lincoln, 31-32. See also William G. Greene’s interview with James Q. Howard, [ca. May 1860], Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress, and Greene, interview with Herndon, Elm Wood, Illinois, 30 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 21; Richard C. McCormick’s reminiscences, New York, 29 April, New York Evening Post, 3 May 1865.

²¹³ Milton Hay to John Hay, Springfield, 8 February 1887, John Hay Papers, Brown University; Gibson William Harris, “My Recollections of Abraham Lincoln,” Woman’s Home Companion, January 1904, 13.

²¹⁴ Hay, “Life in the White House in the Time of Lincoln,” in Burlingame, ed., At Lincoln’s Side, 137-38.

²¹⁵ Wilson, Honor’s Voice, 72-73.

²¹⁶ John McNamar to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 25 November 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 421.

William Dean Howells reported that in later years, when Lincoln traveled the circuit as a lawyer, “a copy of Burns was his inseparable companion.” Howells added that Lincoln also esteemed Edgar Allen Poe: “The bent of his [Lincoln’s] mind . . . is mathematical and metaphysical, and he is therefore pleased with the absolute and logical method of Poe’s tales and sketches, in which the problem of mystery is given, and wrought out into every-day facts by processes of cunning analysis.”²¹⁷ He particularly admired Poe’s poem “The Raven,” which he repeated again and again.²¹⁸ In addition he was “strongly attracted” to Poe’s tales, notably “The Gold Bug” and “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar.”²¹⁹

Jack Kelso, a childless handyman and “very lazy” devotee of hunting and fishing, helped refine Lincoln’s literary taste.²²⁰ His grandnephew, who remembered him as an old man, described Kelso as “about five feet ten inches tall and inclined to be stout, weighed about 200 pounds. . . . He and his wife lived very happily together. She made a baby of him and did practically all the work and he seemed willing for her to do it for he was not fond of work.”²²¹ Kelso “liked to drink a good deal,” and when intoxicated, “would quote poetry” and “brace up his shoulders and display his learning.”²²² According to New Salem tradition, Kelso was “one of those peculiar, impractical geniuses – well educated, a lover of nature,

²¹⁷ Howells, Lincoln, ed. Pratt, 31-32.

²¹⁸ John Todd Stuart, interview with Herndon, 20 December 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 519.

²¹⁹ Harris, “My Recollections of Lincoln,” 13.

²²⁰ James Short to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 7 July 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 74; Onstot, Pioneers of Menard and Mason Counties, 155; McKenzie, “A Demographic Study of Select New Salem Precinct Residents,” 185-88.

²²¹ Henry C. Cook to Maud Miller Wilson, Rockport, Missouri, November 1938, quoted in Fern Nance Pond, “New Salem’s Miller and Kelso,” Lincoln Herald 52 (1950): 29. Cook added that “Uncle Jack was a clean, tasty fellow, dressed well and was always clean shaven. He had a good education for those times.”

²²² Reminiscences of John Watkins, paraphrased by Thomas P. Reep, based on an interview conducted by Reep in 1890, Reep’s interview with Joseph F. Booton, Petersburg, Illinois, 18 October 1934, typescript, p. 53, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

with the soul of a poet and all of a poet’s impracticality, and would could recite Shakespeare and Burns by the hour.” His wife, “ambitious to get ahead,” took in “all the transient and regular boarders she could get.”²²³ One of those boarders was probably Lincoln. The two men became “great friends” and were “always together – always talking and arguing.”²²⁴ Often they would sit together on the banks of the Sangamo and quote Shakespeare.²²⁵

Lincoln continued reading Shakespeare well after he left New Salem. The Bard of Avon “was his constant companion. He took a copy with him almost always when traveling, and read it at leisure moments.”²²⁶ He especially liked political figures, including Richard III, Hamlet, Macbeth, Julius Caesar, and Coriolanus. His favorite plays were Hamlet and Macbeth.²²⁷ As president, Lincoln recited soliloquies from Hamlet and Richard III and told an actor that he had read and re-read Shakespeare “perhaps as frequently as any unprofessional reader.”²²⁸

Lincoln had little use for novels.²²⁹ He confided to Whitney “that he had never read a novel clear through.”²³⁰ (One that he began but never finished was Walter Scott’s

²²³ Reep, Lincoln at New Salem, 54, 117-18.

²²⁴ Hardin Bale, interview with Herndon, [1866], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 528. On Bale (1816-79), see McKenzie, “A Demographic Study of Select New Salem Precinct Residents,” 43-45.

²²⁵ Caleb Carman, interview with Herndon, 12 October 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 374; William G. Greene, interview with Herndon, Elm Wood, Illinois, 30 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 21

²²⁶ Isaac N. Arnold, The Life of Abraham Lincoln (Chicago: Jensen, McClurg, 1885), 444.

²²⁷ Whitney, Life on the Circuit, ed. Angle, 425.

²²⁸ Carpenter, Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1866), 50-52; Lincoln to James H. Hackett, Washington, 17 August 1863, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 6:392.

²²⁹ Robert L. Wilson, who knew Lincoln well in the 1830s, said he “never read Novels.” Robert L. Wilson to Herndon, Sterling, Illinois, 10 February 1866, ibid., 205. James Short “never knew of his reading a novel.” N. W. Branson to Herndon, Petersburg, 3 August 1865, ibid., 90.

²³⁰ Whitney, Life on the Circuit, ed. Angle, 121.

Ivanhoe.)²³¹ Abner Y. Ellis, however, recalled that Lincoln read and recommended to him Nathaniel Beverly Tucker's George Balcombe: A Novel, published in 1836. According to Ellis, he also enjoyed stories by Caroline Lee Hentz and Hamilton C. Jones, and borrowed from him plays by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, James Kenney, and John M. Morton.²³²

Lincoln's course of self-improvement drew him into the meetings of the Literary and Debating Society in New Salem, presided over by the warm, generous, and sociable James Rutledge. When Lincoln first spoke before the group in the winter of 1831-32, standing with his hands in his pockets, everyone expected him to tell a funny story. To their amazement, he focused seriously on the question before the society. As he proceeded, he awkwardly gestured to emphasize his points, which were so convincing that they astonished his largely uneducated audience. After the meeting, Rutledge told his wife that "there was more in Abe's head than wit and fun, that he was already a fine speaker; that all he lacked was culture to enable him to reach the high destiny which he knew was in store for him."²³³ As Lincoln spoke at more and more such unpretentious meetings, sometimes held in a vacant store-room, he displayed the logic, intelligence, and spontaneity that would make him the most formidable debater in the New Salem area. As Charles Maltby recalled, in these discussions, "primitive and simple in their character," Lincoln "exhibited the germ of those logical and argumentative powers of reasoning for which he was distinguished in his subsequent life."²³⁴ Daniel Burner considered Lincoln "a good debater" who "couldn't be beaten by any one in

²³¹ Carpenter, Six Months at the White House, 114-15.

²³² Abner Y. Ellis, statement for Herndon, enclosed in Ellis to Herndon, Moro, Illinois, 23 January 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 172, and Ellis to Herndon, Moro, Illinois, 30 January 1866, ibid., 179. Caroline Lee Hentz's stories were published in the paper that Lincoln was most closely associated with, the Springfield Illinois State Journal. See issue of 12 April 1856.

²³³ Robert B. Rutledge, son of James Rutledge, to Herndon, [ca. 1 November 1866], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 384-85..

²³⁴ Maltby, Lincoln, 28.

those parts.” He was so spontaneous that arguments “seemed to come right out of him without study or long preparation.”²³⁵

Lincoln’s sharpness in debate may have been honed by Mentor Graham, whose forte as a teacher was elocution. The schoolmaster would have his charges repeat a sentence twenty or more times until they had delivered it properly. Quite possibly he had Lincoln perform such exercises.

No records of Rutledge’s debating club survive, but some do for other nearby clubs. They usually met once a month, had rules about such things as orderly behavior and not invoking God in the argument, and often required that members participate in debate, declamation, composition, criticism and lecturing. Anonymous papers were solicited and read aloud at meetings, though the bylaws of the Rock Creek Lyceum stipulated that an “anonymous reader shall examine the contents of his box, and on finding any obscene documents by this act be empowered to burn them without further ceremony.” Order did not always prevail. At least one of these clubs, the Rock Creek Lyceum, had its meeting broken up by roughnecks one evening. Fittingly, at the time they were debating the question: “Which is the greatest evil which the human family is infested with?” Because of the disruption, they adjourned before reaching a verdict.²³⁶ Debate topics included what should be done with free blacks if slavery were abolished, and whether slavery had been beneficial or not. There were also debates on public works, temperance, banking, public land policy, marriage, and female voting and education. In time, Lincoln would address many of these issues in his political career.

²³⁵ Temple, ed., “Lincoln and the Burners at New Salem,” 68-69.

²³⁶ Records of the Rock Creek Lyceum, copy, Fern Nance Pond Papers, Menard County Historical Museum, Petersburg, Illinois.

While Lincoln's studies progressed well, his career as a store clerk did not. His case was hardly unique; a resident of central Illinois observed in 1835 that "Merchandizing is a tolerably good business, for those who understand it well, and have a sufficient capital to meet all of their engagements. We have but a few such merchants here[,] however, and consequently merchandizing among the Suckers is considered rather a dangerous business."²³⁷ The flighty Offutt neglected his store, which failed in early 1832, leaving Lincoln and Maltby unemployed.²³⁸ Casting about for work, they, like many other New Salemites, found beguiling the prospect of steamboats on the shallow, twisting, driftwood-choked Sangamon River.

Excitement ran high when Vincent A. Bogue, owner of a store and mill near Springfield, announced that he would slash freight rates in half by running a "splendid upper cabin steamer," The Talisman, to Springfield.²³⁹ Farmers in the region might prosper by cheaply shipping their crops to St. Louis and New Orleans; merchants, mechanics, and professional men also stood to gain.²⁴⁰ Lincoln and Maltby, "believing that New Salem offered good facilities for a shipping point, in connection with the steamboat enterprise, purchased a large log building . . . and made preparations before the arrival of the steamer for a storage, forwarding and commission business."²⁴¹ Bogue hired Lincoln and others to clear

²³⁷ Stephen A. Douglas to Julius N. Granger, Jacksonville, 24 May 1835, Johannsen, ed., Letters of Douglas, 19.

²³⁸ A leading authority on Offutt concluded that "All his hopes and schemes had been built upon the implicit confidence that the Sangamon River was navigable. Efforts to establish that important fact had flatly failed. Furthermore, New Salem had too many stores; and his, located near the steamboat wharf that was never to be, was farthest from the center of the village." Townsend, Lincoln and the Bluegrass, 44.

²³⁹ Bogue to Edward Mitchell, Cincinnati, 6 January, Sangamo Journal, 25 January 1832; advertisement in the Cincinnati Gazette, 16 January 1832, reprinted ibid., 16 February 1832; John Carroll Power, History of the Early Settlers of Sangamon County, Illinois (Springfield: Edwin A. Wilson, 1876), 42-43; Harry E. Pratt, "Lincoln Pilots the Talisman," Abraham Lincoln Quarterly 2 (1943): 319-29.

²⁴⁰ Sangamo Journal, 29 March 1832.

²⁴¹ Maltby, Lincoln, 30.

the Sangamon.²⁴² In March, the little vessel reached New Salem, where it stored part of its cargo at Lincoln and Maltby's warehouse, then passed upriver as far as Portland Landing, about seven miles from Springfield. All seemed propitious until the water level began falling, and the boat had to return, with Lincoln acting as assistant pilot. It retreated slowly, making only three or four miles a day in the face of stiff prairie winds. A sense of déjà vu may have overcome Lincoln when the vessel stuck on the milldam at New Salem. Observers there noted ominously that it appeared in a "ruinous condition," the cabin and upper portions of the vessel "badly broken and injured" by trees.²⁴³ The crew tore away part of the dam and proceeded ignominiously to Beardstown, their mission a failure. Lincoln pocketed a \$40 fee and trudged back to New Salem, where his warehousing business proved no more successful than Offutt's store.²⁴⁴

BLACK HAWK WAR SERVICE

Upon his return from Beardstown, Lincoln found New Salem astir with fresh excitement. Chief Black Hawk had led 800 members of the so-called "British Band" of Sauk and Mesquakie (or Fox) tribes across the Mississippi to repossess lands in northern Illinois that they had earlier ceded to the U.S. government.²⁴⁵ When Governor John Reynolds called

²⁴² According to Harvey Lee Ross, Lincoln went to Beardstown and offered Bogue his services as a pilot, which were accepted. Ross, Lincoln's First Years in Illinois, 25.

²⁴³ Maltby, Lincoln, 29.

²⁴⁴ J. Rowan Herndon to William H. Herndon, Quincy, Illinois, 11 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 34; Maltby, Lincoln, 30.

²⁴⁵ In 1816 Black Hawk had signed a treaty in effect ratifying an 1804 agreement which had ceded all the land bounded by the Mississippi, Illinois, and Wisconsin Rivers. Black Hawk maintained that he misunderstood the 1816 document. When its terms were later made clear to him, he said, "What do we know of the manners and customs of the white people? They might buy our bodies for dissection and we would touch the goose quill to confirm it, without knowing what we are doing. This was the case with myself and people in touching the goose

up the militia, Lincoln and sixty-seven others from the New Salem area gathered on April 21 at Richland. There a prosperous saw-mill owner, William Kirkpatrick, expected to be chosen captain by the assembled company.²⁴⁶ Reluctantly Lincoln challenged him, according to Leonard Swett, who reported that when “the Company came to choose officers, a Major of some military pretensions, who came duly accout[e]red to the Company, declared himself a candidate for Captain. The boys insisted they were going to have Lincoln. The mode of election was then, for the Company to form a line, and the candidate to march in front, and as many as wished to vote for him formed behind him; and the man who could attach to himself the longest string of men, was elected. When the word was given, Lincoln’s friends seized hold of him, as he had been declining, forced him ahead, and when the count was made, he had the most.”²⁴⁷ (One observer later said of the mortified Kirkpatrick that he “felt badly to see him cut so.”)²⁴⁸ Gleefully Lincoln exclaimed to William G. Greene: “I’ll be damned, Bill, but I’ve beat him!”²⁴⁹ This honor, Lincoln wrote in 1859, was “a success which gave me more pleasure than any which I have had since.”²⁵⁰

quill the first time.” Quoted in Ford, History of Illinois, ed. Quaife, 1:155n. For an overview of the conflict, see Roger L. Nicholas, Black Hawk and the Warrior’s Path (Arlington Heights, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, 1992).

²⁴⁶ Howells, Lincoln, ed. Pratt, 38.

²⁴⁷ Leonard Swett to J. H. Drummond, Bloomington, Illinois, 27 May 1860, Portland, Maine, Evening Express, n.d., copied in the New York Sun, 26 July 1891. Cf. Swett’s account of this election in Allen Thorndike Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln by Distinguished Men of His Time (New York: North American Review, 1888), 464-65. The roster of Lincoln’s company is in Ellen M. Whitney, ed., The Black Hawk War, 1831-1832 (4 vols.; Springfield: Lincoln Presidential Library, 1970-78), 1:176-78. The editors of Lincoln Day by Day and Reinhardt Luthin erroneously stated that Lincoln had been elected a captain of the militia company on April 7, 1831. In fact, his commission, signed by Governor John Reynolds on December 20, 1832, was backdated to April 7, 1831. Wayne C. Temple, “Lincoln’s Arms, Dress and Military Duty during and after the Black Hawk War,” in Temple, “Lincoln-Grant, Illinois Militiamen” (pamphlet; Springfield: State of Illinois, 1981), 17.

²⁴⁸ J. G. Holland, The Life of Abraham Lincoln (Springfield, Massachusetts: Gurdon Bill, 1866), 49.

²⁴⁹ Greene, who alleged this was the only time he ever heard Lincoln swear, told the story to Henry C. Whitney. Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 96.

²⁵⁰ Autobiography enclosed in Lincoln to Jesse W. Fell, Springfield, 20 December 1859, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:512.

One member of Lincoln's unit (the Fourth Illinois Regiment of Mounted Volunteers, which included some of the Clary's Grove boys) called it "the hardest set of men he ever saw."²⁵¹ The poet William Cullen Bryant described them as "unkempt and unshaved, wearing shirts of dark calico, and sometimes calico capotes."²⁵² Their behavior could be as unmilitary as their garb; when Captain Lincoln issued his first order, he was told: "Go to the devil, sir!"²⁵³

Although he may have had some rudimentary militia training in Indiana, Lincoln knew little military terminology.²⁵⁴ Years later, he recalled that one day as he was drilling his troops, he wished them to pass through a gateway: "I could not for the life of me remember the proper word of command for getting my company endwise so that it could get through the gate, so as we came near the gate I shouted: 'This company is dismissed for two minutes, when it will fall in again on the other side of the gate.'"²⁵⁵

Despite his "desire to get into an engagement to see how they would meet Powder & Lead," Lincoln witnessed no combat during his three brief tours of duty over the next eighty

²⁵¹ Benjamin F. Irwin to Herndon, Pleasant Plains, Illinois, 22 September 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 353. Another comrade in arms termed Lincoln's outfit "the wildest company in the world," and Benjamin F. Irwin said it was comprised of "a whole souled hard set of men all fighting stock after the Pugalistic Stile." John Todd Stuart, interview with John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 23 June 1875, Michael Burlingame, ed., An Oral History of Abraham Lincoln: John G. Nicolay's Interviews and Essays (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 9; Benjamin F. Irwin to Herndon, Pleasant Plains, Illinois, 22 September 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 353.

²⁵² William Cullen Bryant to his wife, Jacksonville, Illinois, 19 June 1832, in Bryant, Prose Writings, ed. Parke Godwin (2 vols.; New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), 2:20.

²⁵³ Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Life of Lincoln, 70.

²⁵⁴ Between his eighteenth birthday in 1827 and his departure for Illinois in 1830, he would have spent a total of at least twelve days in militia training if he complied with Indiana law. C. T. Baker, "Abe Lincoln's First Military Training in Spencer Co.," Grandview, Indiana, Monitor, 22 March 1934.

²⁵⁵ Ben: Perley Poore in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 218-19.

days.²⁵⁶ During his first (April 21 to May 27 tour) he marched west to the Illinois River, then north to the Mississippi, then to Rock Island, where he and his men were officially mustered into U.S. service. They proceeded up the Rock River to Dixon's Ferry, then south to Ottawa, where they were disbanded, but not before they had observed casualties. On May 15, Lincoln and his comrades reached the battlefield of Stillman's Run, where a small band of Indians had routed a much larger militia force. There they found eleven soldiers' corpses, "all scalped some with the heads cut off Many with their throats cut and otherwise Barbourously Mutilated."²⁵⁷ A week later near Ottawa they discovered hanging upside down the mutilated bodies of massacred women and children.²⁵⁸ As a member of Lincoln's company reported, "We Saw the Scalps they had taken – scalps of old women & children. . . . The Indians Scalped an old Grand Mother – Scalped her – hung her scalp on a ram rod – that it might be seen & aggravate the whites – They cut one woman open – hung a child that they had murdered in the woman[']s belly that they had gutted – strong men wept at this – hard hearted men Cried."²⁵⁹ After Stillman's Run, "all the troops became panic-stricken and liable to stampede." As Lincoln's company marched along with others, "they became suddenly alarmed by an over-whelmingly large force of Indians. Lincoln happened at the precise moment to be riding a horse belonging to another man. The chances were that all the footmen

²⁵⁶ Benjamin F. Irwin to Herndon, Pleasant Plains, Illinois, 22 September 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 353. It was unusual for anyone to serve in three or more units during the Black Hawk War; only 5.9% of volunteers from Sangamon County did so. Winkle, The Young Eagle, 93.

²⁵⁷ William Miller?, statement for Herndon, September 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 362. Royal Clary, a member of Lincoln's company, said that the corpses "were horribly mangled – heads cut off – heart taken out – & disfigured in Every way." Clary to Herndon, [October 1866?], ibid., 371. See also J. H. Pugh to "Gentlemen," Dixon's Ferry, 17 May, Sangamo Journal, 31 May 1832.

²⁵⁸ Frank E. Stevens, The Black Hawk War (Chicago: Frank E. Stevens, 1903), 149-58.

²⁵⁹ Royal Clary to Herndon, [October 1866?], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 372.

would be murdered, but instead of making his escape, he hunted up the owner of the horse, and took his chances on foot.”²⁶⁰

At the end of May, after a month’s service, the 1400-man volunteer army disbanded. Only 300 of its members (including Lincoln) reenlisted.²⁶¹ The other 1100, “a half-organized rabble,” were “demoralized and clamored to go home, claiming that their term of enlistment was about expired, that their crops and business at home demanded their attention, that they were dissatisfied with their commanding officers, [and] that they did not enlist to chase Indians through the swamps of Wisconsin.” These troops “were, in fact, disappointed in their anticipations of a pleasant picnic or spree, with pay and rations; were tired of their hard fare, and not certain about the safety of their scalps.” They had “no respect whatever” their commander’s “prowess and military ability,” for “General Sam Whiteside, renowned as a dauntless bushranger and hand-to-hand Indian fighter, proved an utter failure as commander of a brigade.” Whiteside “knew nothing of military tactics, and made no effort to assert control of his men.”²⁶²

Lincoln reenlisted because, as he put it, “I was out of work, and there being no danger of more fighting, I could do nothing better.”²⁶³ He joined Elijah Isles’ company, comprised of sixty-one “generals, colonels, captains, and distinguished men from the disbanded

²⁶⁰ Leonard Swett to J. H. Drummond, Bloomington, Illinois, 27 May 1860, Portland, Maine, Evening Express, n.d., copied in the New York Sun, 26 July 1891.

²⁶¹ Harry E. Pratt, “Lincoln in the Black Hawk War,” in O. Frito Ander, ed., The John H. Hauberg Historical Essays (Augustana Library Publications, no. 26; Rock Island, Illinois: Augustana Book Concern, 1954), 24.

²⁶² John F. Snyder, Adam W. Snyder and His Period in Illinois History, 1817-1842 (2nd ed., rev.; Virginia, Illinois: E. Needham, 1906), 122-23, 136-37.

²⁶³ Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 73. According to a historian of the conflict, he had hoped once again to lead a company, but when Alexander White was chosen as its captain, “Lincoln was made angry, so the next day he enlisted in the [Elijah] Isles company” as a private and served with it for twenty days.” Frank E. Stevens to the Chicago History Museum, Springfield, 7 June 1938, Jacob Early Collection, Chicago History Museum. Stevens confused Abraham Lincoln of Hancock County (who served in White’s company) with his cousin Abraham Lincoln of Sangamon County. Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 240.

army.”²⁶⁴ (Lincoln was mustered into the service of the U.S. by Lt. Robert Anderson, who in 1861 would command Fort Sumter when it fell to the Confederates.)²⁶⁵ They were part of a cavalry force charged with protecting the frontier until a new army could be mustered in. They scouted in northern Illinois, reassuring settlers and menacing Black Hawk as best they could.²⁶⁶ While undertaking a risky mission to Galena, they paused to bury the victims of yet another massacre.²⁶⁷

On June 20, Lincoln volunteered for his final tour as a private in Dr. Jacob Early’s Independent Spy Company, a thirty-six man outfit which “was used chiefly to carry messages, to send an express, to spy the enemy, and to ascertain facts.” This unit came upon the corpses of several troops killed at Kellogg’s Grove. As one of Lincoln’s messmates recalled, the “only part we could then act, was to seek the lost men, and with hatchets and hands to bury them.”²⁶⁸ Lincoln described the scene: “The red light of the morning sun was streaming upon them as they lay heads towards us on the ground. And every man had a round red spot on the top of his head about as big as a dollar, where the redskins had taken his scalp. It was frightful, but it was grotesque; and the red sunlight seemed to paint everything

²⁶⁴ Elijah Iles to Isaac N. Arnold, Springfield, 7 December 1868, in Arnold, “Address before the Chicago History Museum, 19 November 1868,” 19-21; Elijah Iles, Sketches of Early Life and Times in Kentucky, Missouri and Illinois (1883; Springfield: Sangamon County Historical Society, 1995), 45; Whitney, ed., Black Hawk War, 1:227-28.

²⁶⁵ Anderson actually mustered Lincoln in twice (May 29 and June 20) and out once (June 16). He later recalled that the “value of his arms was forty dollars and his horse and equipments was one hundred and twenty dollars.” Anderson to E. B. Washburne, Tours, France, 10 May 1870, Chicago History 3 (1952): 154. After the fall of Fort Sumter, Lincoln invited Anderson to the White House, where the president asked: “Major, do you remember of ever meeting me before?” Anderson replied: “No, I have no recollection of ever having had that pleasure.” Lincoln said: “My memory is better than yours. You mustered me into the United States service, as a high private of the Illinois volunteers, at Dixon’s Ferry, in the Black-Hawk War.” Arnold, “Address before the Chicago Historical Society, 19 November 1868,” 16.

²⁶⁶ John Todd Stuart, interview with John G. Nicolay, 23 June 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 9.

²⁶⁷ Iles, Early Life and Times, 47-51.

²⁶⁸ George M. Harrison to Herndon, [late summer 1866?], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 327-28.

all over.”²⁶⁹ (In 1860, a political opponent of Lincoln’s belittled the record of Early’s unit: “This company of high privates hung upon the skirts of the army, pretending to act as a spy company to find out the position of the enemy. They were constantly reporting to the Commander in Chief new Indian camps and fresh moccasin signs, and kept the army marching up and down the country in quest of this evidence of the enemy, and invariably when the army arrived at the place indicated by them no enemy was there, or had been there. In this way the company fell into general disrepute with men and officers of every other part of the army.”)²⁷⁰

When not marching, Lincoln and his comrades held foot races, swam, wrestled, and played chess, checkers, and cards.²⁷¹ Lincoln entertained the troops with stories. One observer at Dixon’s Ferry remembered that “every evening, when off duty, Lincoln could be found sitting on the grass, with a group of soldiers, eagerly listening to his stories, of which his endless supply seemed, even at that early day, inexhaustible.”²⁷² Their food was not always appetizing, and they could well have complained like the Texan who described the meals provided by his employer: “usually we have apologies for breakfast, promises for dinner, and disappointment for supper.”²⁷³ They baked bread on ramrods; ate fried meat off of elm bark; and used hatchet handles to grind coffee in tin cups.²⁷⁴ Lincoln said of some chickens that his colleagues consumed one evening, “They are much like eating saddle bags,

²⁶⁹ Francis Fisher Brown, The Every-Day Life of Lincoln (New York: N. D. Thompson, 1886), 107. For unexplained reasons, Milo Quaipe doubted this story, whose source is unidentified. Quaipe, ed., Ford’s History, 1:184-85n.

²⁷⁰ Letter by “Scrutatok,” New York, 4 July, New York Herald, 9 July 1860.

²⁷¹ George M. Harrison to Herndon, Richland, Illinois, 29 January 1867, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 553-54.

²⁷² John Dixon, paraphrased in Arnold, “Address before the Chicago Historical Society,” 16.

²⁷³ Edward Everett Dale, “Pioneer Speech,” in Ander, ed., Hauberg Historical Essays, 34.

²⁷⁴ George M. Harrison to Lincoln, n.p., 29 May 1860, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

but I think the stomach can accomplish much to day.” His comrades unanimously chose him water bearer, a post he accepted, in part because it exempted him from cooking, gathering wood, and other distasteful chores.²⁷⁵ During his three-week stint with the spy battalion, Lincoln and John Todd Stuart joined others in search of feminine companionship at Galena. Stuart, who came to know Lincoln well in the Black Hawk War, recollected that they “went to the hoar houses – Gen [James D.] Henry went – his magnetism drew all the women to himself – All went purely for fun – devilment – nothing Else.”²⁷⁶ All in all, Stuart remembered, he and Lincoln “had a first rate time on this campaign – we were well provided – the whole thing was a sort of frolic.”²⁷⁷

Not everyone regarded the conflict so positively. To chase a few hundred Indian warriors from Illinois, 10,000 state militiamen, aided by one third of the U.S. army’s regular troops, spent \$2,000,000; the lives of 72 whites and approximately 600 to 1000 Indians were lost by the time hostilities ended in August.²⁷⁸

A fellow militiaman, George Harrison, remembered that Lincoln was “always cheerful, and his spirit and temper such as would engender the like cheerfulness in all surrounding minds: in fact the whole company, even amid trouble and suffering, received Strength & fortitude, by his buoyancy & elasticity.”²⁷⁹ Stuart recalled that “Lincoln had no

²⁷⁵ George M. Harrison to Herndon, Richland, Illinois, 29 January 1867, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 555.

²⁷⁶ John Todd Stuart, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 481.

²⁷⁷ John Todd Stuart, interview with John G. Nicolay, 23 June 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 9.

²⁷⁸ John Moses, Illinois: Historical and Statistical (2 vols.; Chicago: Fergus, 1889), 1:377; Whitney, ed., Black Hawk War, 1:vii; Davis, Frontier Illinois, 198; Nichols, Black Hawk, 135.

²⁷⁹ Harrison to Herndon, [late summer 1866?], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 330. William G. Greene recalled that Lincoln “was idolized by his men & generally by all the Regiment & Core to which he belonged.” Greene to Herndon (interview), Elm Wood, Illinois, 30 May 1865, ibid., 18. According to William Miller, Lincoln during his first tour “had the Confidence of every man in his company and they Strictly obeyed his orders at a word.” Miller added “that when any of his company got into a Muss or quarrel Lincoln could

military qualities whatever except that he was a good clever fellow and kept the esteem and respect of his men. He made a very good Captain.” He “was exceedingly popular,” Stuart explained, because he was “so good natured, genial, upright, . . . able to tell a story better, and more of them, than any man in the batallion” and because “he had the reputation of being the best wrestler in the army – he could generally throw down anybody he came across.”²⁸⁰

As a captain, Lincoln was solicitous of his troops’ welfare and quick to defend their interests.

When a regular army officer asserted that his own troops “had a preference in the rations & pay” and ordered Lincoln “to do some act, which he decreed unauthorized: he however

obeyed, but went to the officer and said to him – ‘Sir – you forget that we are not under the rules and regulations of the war department at Washington – are only volunteers under the orders & Regulations of Illinois. Keep in your own sphere & and there will be no difficulty,

but resistance will hereafter be made to your injust orders. & further my men must be Equal in all particulars in rations – arms – camps &c to the regular Army.’” William G. Greene

recalled that the officer “saw that Mr L was right and determined to have justice done.

Always after this we were treated Equally well & just as the regular Army was in ev[e]ry particular. This brave – just and humane act in behalf of the volunteers at once firmly

attached officers & rank to him as with hooks of Steel.”²⁸¹

Stop it at a word he had such perfect control over them.” He “was always Lively in a good humor and full of Anecdotes.” William Miller, statement for Herndon, [September 1866?], ibid., 363; Miller paraphrased in Benjamin F. Irwin to Herndon, Pleasant Plains, Illinois, 22 September 1866, ibid., 353.

²⁸⁰ John Todd Stuart, interview with James Q. Howard, [May 1860], copy in the hand of John G. Nicolay, John Hay Papers, Brown University; Stuart, interview with John G. Nicolay, 23 June 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 8-9. J. Rowan Herndon reported that Lincoln “Became very Poupelar whilst in the army” because “he Could thrown Down any man that took hold of him,” “out jump the Best of them,” “out Box the Best of them,” and “Beat all of them on anictdote.” Lincoln, Herndon said, “was the favorite of all of them and he Loved all of them as they Loved him.” J. Rowan Herndon to William H. Herndon, Quincy, Illinois, 28 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 6-7.

²⁸¹ Greene to Herndon (interview), Elm Wood, Illinois, 30 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 19.

Lincoln was not popular with everyone. His superiors disciplined him for firing his pistol near the camp and for his troops' drunkenness. In the first instance, he was arrested for a day; in the second, he was made to carry a wooden sword for two days.²⁸² Two privates in the company he commanded described their war experiences to a Democratic historian and Confederate veteran, John F. Snyder, who reported that they "never spoke in malice of Lincoln, but always in the spirit of ridicule. They regarded him as a joke, an absurdity, and had serious doubts of his courage. Any old woman, they said, would have made a more creditable commander of a company than he did. Profoundly ignorant of military matters, and, from fear of losing his popularity, he made no pretense, or effort, to enforce discipline, or control his men in any way."²⁸³

Lincoln, in fact, did discipline his men on occasion. Greene remembered that one day an "old Indian Came to Camp & delivered himself up, showing us an old paper written by [Secretary of War] Lewis Cass, Stating that the Indian was a good & true man." Many troops declared "we have come out to fight the Indians and by God we intend to do so." Lincoln, "in the goodness & kindness and humanity & justice of his nature stood – got between the Indian and the outraged men – saying – 'Men this must not be done – he must not be shot and killed by us.'" When some troops accused the Indian of being a spy, Lincoln continued standing "between the Indian & the vengeance of the outraged soldiers – brave, good & true."

"This is cowardly on your part Lincoln," he was told.

²⁸² David M. Pantier to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 21 July 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 78; William T. Baker, in Stevens, A Reporter's Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 124.

²⁸³ John F. Snyder to Frank E. Stevens, Virginia, Illinois, 1 April and 28 March 1916, Frank E. Stevens Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Two of Snyder's informants were his neighbors Travis Elmore and Nathan Drake. Surviving records identify them as members of Lincoln's company. Other informants were members of Captain Allen F. Lindsey's company (including Royal Flynn), which traveled and camped with Lincoln's unit. Snyder to Stevens, Virginia, Illinois, 20 January 1917, ibid.; Whitney, ed., Black Hawk War, 1:178.

He replied, “‘if any man thinks I am a coward let him test it,’ rising to an unusual height.”

One member of the regiment protested, saying, “Lincoln – you are larger & heavier than we are.”

“This you can guard against – Choose your weapons,” Lincoln retorted “somewhat sourly.” This challenge “soon put to silence quickly all Charges of the Cowardice of Lincoln.”

Greene reported that this episode was “amongst the first times I ever saw Mr Lincoln aroused. He was unusually kind, pleasant – good humored, taking any & all things. But this was too much for Lincoln. This hushed up at once all disputes about Lincoln[']s courage. I was through the Black Hawk war with Lincoln and can say no man was more Courageous, truly & manly so. No man had more moral courage. He would do justice to all though the heavens fell.”²⁸⁴

On another occasion, Lincoln had to curb the unfair impulses of his troops. At the beginning of hostilities, Lincoln’s company and Lorenzo Dow Thompson’s from St. Clair both wanted the same campsite. To determine which would prevail, a wrestling match was arranged with Lincoln representing his unit. He boastfully said to the organizers of the match, “Gentleman, I have felt of Mr. Thompson, the St. Clair champion, and told my boys I could throw him, and they could bet what they pleased.” Recalling the event decades later, Lincoln added: “You see, I had never been thrown. . . . You may think a wrestle, or ‘wrestle,’ as we called such contests of skill and strength, was a small matter, but I tell you the whole army was out to see it. We took our holds, his choice first, a side hold. I then realized from his grip for the first time, that he was a powerful man and that I would have no easy job. The struggle

was a severe one, but after many passes and efforts he threw me. My boys yelled out ‘a dog fall,’ which meant then a drawn battle, but I told my boys it was fair, and then said to Thompson, ‘now it’s your turn to go down,’ as it was my hold then, Indian hug. We took our holds again and after the fiercest struggle I ever had, he threw me again, almost as easily at my hold as at his own.”²⁸⁵ Unwilling to lose their bet, Lincoln’s men protested, but he insisted that they pay: “Boys the man actually threw me once fair – broadly so. & the second time – this very fall he threw me fairly, though not so apparently so.”²⁸⁶ During the Civil War, Lincoln wanted to appoint Thompson to some office “just to show him I didn’t bear any malice,” as he explained to William G. Greene.²⁸⁷ Thompson “held Lincoln in high estimation because he was a funny fellow ‘and much of a man.’”²⁸⁸

Lincoln had more success when challenged by “the champion of the Southern companies,” who, he recalled, “was at least two inches taller and somewhat heavier.” But, Lincoln said, “I reckoned that I was the most wiry, and soon after I had tackled him I gave

²⁸⁴ Greene to Herndon (interview), Elm Wood, Illinois, 30 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 18-19. See also Royal Clary, interview with Herndon, [October 1866], ibid., 372.

²⁸⁵ Reminiscences of a conversation held at Lincoln’s Springfield home on 8 August 1860, with Risdon M. Moore, in Moore, “Mr. Lincoln as a Wrestler,” Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society 9 (1904): 433-34. Moore’s uncle, William Moore, had commanded the St. Clair company to which Thomson belonged. In Moore’s account, Lincoln said, “Why, gentlemen, that man could throw a grizzly bear.”

²⁸⁶ William G. Greene to Herndon (interview), Elm Wood, Illinois, 30 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 19; Greene’s recollections, dated Tallula, 1882, in Oldroyd, ed., Lincoln Memorial, 517; Greene, interviewed by George A. Pierce, correspondence dated “on the cars,” 12 April, Chicago Inter-Ocean, 30 April 1881; Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 97-98; Moore, “Lincoln as a Wrestler,” 433-34.

²⁸⁷ William G. Greene, interviewed by George A. Pierce, correspondence dated “on the cars,” 12 April, Chicago Inter-Ocean, 30 April 1881.

²⁸⁸ Joseph Gillespie to Isaac N. Arnold, Edwardsville, Illinois, 6 September 1881, in Isaac N. Arnold, “Abraham Lincoln: A Paper Read before the Royal Historical Society, London, June 16th, 1881” (pamphlet; Chicago: Fergus, 1881), 194a-b. During the Civil War, Gillespie discussed this episode with Lincoln, who “alluded very kindly to Dow Thompson, and had kept trace [track] of him from St. Clair County, Illinois, to Arkansas. Dow was a true specimen of the genus Pioneer. His property was all absorbed in paying fines for fighting with the Germans, who began soon after the Blackhawk war to move into St. Clair county, and Dow had to emigrate, and like most of his class, went to Arkansas where game was more abundant and he could fight in peace ‘without being troubled with the minions of the law.’ Dow had no malice in his composition. He seldom fought because he was mad, but just to find out who was the best man; but his curiosity on this head was intense and often gratified.” Ibid.

him a hug, lifted him off the ground, and threw him flat on his back. That settled his hash.”²⁸⁹

Lincoln was proud of his wrestling skills. When during his presidency he was told that George Washington was famed as a wrestler, Lincoln replied: “If George was loafing around here now, I should be glad to have a tussle with him, and I rather believe that one of the plain people of Illinois would be able to manage the aristocrat of old Virginia.”²⁹⁰

In 1848, as Lincoln ridiculed Democratic presidential nominee Lewis Cass, he poked fun at his own service record: “in the days of the Black Hawk War, I fought, bled, and came away,” he told his fellow Representatives on the floor of the U.S. House. “I was not at Stillman’s defeat, but I was about as near it, as Cass was to Hull’s surrender, and like him, I saw the place very soon after. It is certain that I did not break my sword, for I had none to break; but I bent a musket pretty badly on one occasion. If Cass broke his sword, the idea is, he broke it in desperation; I bent the musket by accident. If Gen: Cass went in advance of me in picking huckleberries, I guess I surpassed him in charges upon the wild onions. If he saw any live, fighting Indians, it was more than I did; but I had a good many bloody struggles with the musketoes; and, although I never fainted from loss of blood, I can truly say I was often very hungry.”²⁹¹

Despite this self-mockery, Lincoln was proud of his role in the Black Hawk War.²⁹² In addition to a morale boost, he derived more tangible benefits, including approximately \$175 and forty acres of public land.²⁹³ The land warrant, which he received in 1852, pleased

²⁸⁹ Ben: Perley Poore in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 219.

²⁹⁰ James Grant Wilson, “Recollections of Lincoln,” Putnam’s Magazine 5 (February 1909): 516.

²⁹¹ Speech in the House of Representatives, 27 July 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:509-10.

²⁹² Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 73.

²⁹³ Harry E. Pratt, The Personal Finances of Abraham Lincoln (Springfield: Abraham Lincoln Association, 1943), 10-11, 68. The \$175 included reimbursement for expenses. Nathaniel G. Wilcox alleged that Lincoln was paid more than he should have been. In 1864, Wilcox told Lincoln that the paymaster, Major Timothy Patrick Andrews, suggested to Lincoln that he receive extra money for a personal servant; that Lincoln said he

him very much.²⁹⁴ Like many other volunteers, he gained popularity among both soldiers and civilians by serving in the war. He made friendships that would prove important for his future careers as a politician and lawyer, most notably with John Todd Stuart, John J. Hardin, Edward D. Baker, and Joseph Gillespie. Though he saw no combat, he got a taste of war as he buried mutilated bodies, and his election as captain whetted his appetite for future electoral victories.²⁹⁵

Lincoln's career as a warrior ended in mid-July, when he was mustered out at a site on the Whitewater River in Wisconsin. Accompanied by George M. Harrison, he walked rather than rode home, for both their horses had been stolen the night before their departure. At Peoria, they bought a canoe, paddled to Havana, sold the boat, and then completed their 250-mile journey on foot.²⁹⁶

FIRST BID FOR ELECTIVE OFFICE

Upon returning to New Salem, Lincoln threw himself into the political campaign which he had decided to enter back in March. After his literary society debut the previous winter, James Rutledge had urged him to run for the legislature. At first Lincoln balked, fearing he had no chance, but Rutledge suggested that “a canvass of the County would bring

was not entitled to any such money for he had no personal servant; and that Andrews paid him the extra amount anyhow, which Lincoln kept. Wilcox to Lincoln, Frederick, Illinois, 3 June 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. In fact, paymaster Andrews did endorse the muster roll of the company Lincoln commanded when it disbanded on May 27, 1832. Whitney, ed., Black Hawk War, 1:178.

²⁹⁴ Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Lincoln, 73.

²⁹⁵ Rodney O. Davis, “‘Success . . . Which Gave Him So Much Satisfaction’: Lincoln in the Black Hawk War,” (pamphlet; Racine: Lincoln Fellowship of Wisconsin, 1996; Historical Bulletin no. 52), 15-17.

²⁹⁶ Harrison to Herndon, [late summer 1866?], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 328-29; John Todd Stuart, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], ibid., 481.

him prominently before the people and in time would do him good.”²⁹⁷ Other friends seconded the idea, but for a different reason. James Matheny remembered that the idea of Lincoln running for the legislature was “regarded as a joke; the boys wanted some fun; he was so uncouth and awkward, and so illy dressed, that his candidacy afforded a pleasant diversion for them, but it was not expected that it would go any further.”²⁹⁸

In March, Lincoln finally agreed to run and issued a lengthy announcement of his candidacy.²⁹⁹ While composing it, he enlisted the help of John McNamar, who corrected his grammar.³⁰⁰ In this formal document, Lincoln rejected the creed of the Jacksonians, which The Democratic Review summarized in 1838: “As little government as possible; that little emanating from, and controlled by, the people; and uniform in its application to all.”³⁰¹ Democrats in general believed that the only assertive action that the federal government should undertake was aggressive foreign expansionism.³⁰² The Whigs, on the other hand, favored positive government.³⁰³ A leading party spokesman, Horace Greeley of the New York Tribune, explained in 1845: “‘THE COMMONWEALTH’ is the term best expressing

²⁹⁷ Robert B. Rutledge to Herndon, [c. 1 November 1866], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 385.

²⁹⁸ Matheny told this to Henry Clay Whitney. Whitney, Life on the Circuit, ed. Angle, 56.

²⁹⁹ Communication to the People of Sangamo County, 9 March 1832, published in the Sangamo Journal of March 15, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:5-9.

³⁰⁰ McNamar to George U. Miles, 5 May 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 253.

³⁰¹ Quoted in Michael F. Holt, The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 67. In 1848, Nahum Capen offered a longer version of the Democratic credo: “The Democratic Party seeks to reach the whole people, and to secure equal rights to all, without unjust sacrifice to any. It stands upon the basis of the Constitution, and yields none of its safeguards to construction. It sustains the humble citizen in all his rights, and the States in their prerogative of sovereignty. It favors simplicity of life, the elevation of the people, and rigid economy in the administration of government. It acts from itself outwardly, and seeks to extend the greatest good to the whole people.” Capen, The Republic of the United States (New York, 1848), quoted in William R. Brock, Parties and Political Conscience: American Dilemmas, 1840-1850 (Millwood, New York: KTO Press, 1979), 11.

³⁰² Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 951-52.

the Whig idea of a State or Nation, and our philosophy regards a Government with hope and confidence, as an agency of the community through which vast and beneficent ends may be accomplished,” unlike the Democrats, who regard government “with distrust and aversion, as an agency mainly of corruption, oppression, and robbery.”³⁰⁴ The “great fundamental principle” of Whiggery, Greeley declared, was that “government is not merely a machine for making war and punishing felons, but is bound to do all that is fairly within its power to promote the welfare of the people – that its legitimate scope is not merely negative, repressive, defensive, but is also affirmative, creative, constructive, beneficent.”³⁰⁵

Lincoln shared the Whig vision. He argued that the “legitimate object of government is ‘to do for the people what needs to be done, but which they can not, by individual effort, do at all, or do so well, for themselves.’ There are many such things – some of them exist independently of the injustice in the world. Making and maintaining roads, bridges, and the like; providing for the helpless young and afflicted; common schools; and disposing of deceased men’s property, are instances.”³⁰⁶

³⁰³ A brief summary of the differences between the Whigs and Democrats can be found in Daniel Feller, The Jacksonian Promise: America, 1815-1840 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 185-89.

³⁰⁴ New York Tribune, 29 November 1845, quoted in Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 70. The motto regularly published in The Democratic Review, “The best government is that which governs least,” prompted a sarcastic outburst from Greeley: “Just think of it! What a stupendous, a fatal mistake our revered fathers must have made in forming and adopting our federal Constitution! What palpable mistakes have since been made by the Free States in establishing, fostering and endowing our common schools! They ought to have ‘governed least’ to please the Democratic Review, and let the children of ignorance and vice grow up ignorant and vicious in sad succession forever! And so of roads, bridges, and all those common conveniences which make up the advantages and comforts of civilized life. All these should have been left to individual enterprise and caprice.” New York Tribune, 2 September 1841, quoted in Brock, Parties and Political Conscience, 12.

³⁰⁵ New York Tribune, 2 June 1848, in Brock, Parties and Political Conscience, 12.

³⁰⁶ Daniel Walker Howe, “Why Abraham Lincoln Was a Whig,” Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association 16 (1995): 27-38; fragment on government, [1 July 1854?], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:220. This dating is probably inaccurate; in all likelihood, it was composed in the 1840s. See headnote for the manuscript of this document, Library of Congress’s on-line edition of the Robert Todd Lincoln Collection of the Papers of Abraham Lincoln.

In his 1832 campaign announcement, Lincoln above all championed government support for internal improvements which would enable subsistence farmers to participate in the market economy and thus escape rural isolation and poverty.³⁰⁷ “That the poorest and most thinly populated countries would be greatly benefitted by the opening of good roads, and in the clearing of navigable streams within their limits, is what no person will deny.” Lincoln, who knew first-hand about poor and thinly populated counties, wanted to spare others the ox-like drudgery that rural isolation had imposed on him and his family.³⁰⁸ To achieve that end, he recommended affordable projects, primarily to facilitate navigation of the Sangamon River, a subject widely discussed that spring, when excitement over the steamboat Talisman peaked. With justice, Lincoln claimed to have some expertise about the prospects for better navigation of the Sangamon: “From my peculiar circumstances, it is probable that for the last twelve months I have given as particular attention to the stage of the water in this river, as any other person in the country.” For reasonable sums, he predicted, the river could be straightened and driftwood cleared from its channel. Desirable as other improvements might be, like canals and railroads, their costs produced “a heart appalling shock.”

Lincoln suggested another means for liberating people from rural poverty: usury laws. The “baneful and corroding system” of lending money at extortionate interest rates “for the

³⁰⁷ This attitude toward the market economy distinguished the Whigs from the Democrats. As a leading historian of the Whig party noted, the “central fault line or cleavage in the electorate separated men with different degrees of experience in and different attitudes toward the market economy and the cultural values it spawned. Broadly put, Democrats were a coalition of those still outside the market economy who feared its spread and those who had experienced and been victimized by market mechanisms. Whigs, in contrast, attracted those who wanted to expand the market sector because they had already enjoyed its benefits or hoped to do so in the future.” Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 115. See also ibid., 951-53, and Brock, Parties and Political Conscience, 20-24.

³⁰⁸ Mark E. Neely, Jr., “Lincoln’s Peculiar Relationship with Indiana,” Inland: The Magazine of the Middle West (1980): 4-7. This brilliant article was reprinted in pamphlet form with the title, “Escape from the Frontier: Lincoln’s Peculiar Relationship with Indiana” (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, n.d.).

benefit of a few individuals” injured “the general interests of the community” by effectively imposing a heavy tax on borrowers. His implicit message was clear: people could not escape poverty without access to loans at reasonable interest rates. It was a popular issue; in 1833 Illinois legislators outlawed interest rates above 12 per cent for loans of a year or longer.³⁰⁹

Yet another technique for emancipating frontiersmen won Lincoln’s approval: public education, which he deemed “the most important subject that we as a people can be engaged in.” The kind of superstitious, primitive ignorance that surrounded him in Kentucky and Indiana could be banished by education, which would promote “morality, sobriety, enterprise, and industry.” Lincoln might have added that, just as he had observed the Sangamon River closely, so too was he intimately familiar with backwoods immorality, drunkenness, indolence, and sloth. He longed for the day when that kind of world – the world of his father – would disappear.

In the final paragraph of his campaign statement Lincoln went beyond policy matters to reveal his personal feelings: “Every man is said to have his peculiar ambition. Whether it be true or not, I can say for one that I have no other so great as that of being truly esteemed of my fellow men, by rendering myself worthy of their esteem. How far I shall succeed in gratifying this ambition, is yet to be developed. I am young and unknown to many of you. I was born and have ever remained in the most humble walks of life. I have no wealthy or popular relations to recommend me. My case is thrown exclusively upon the independent voters of this country, and if elected they will have conferred a favor upon me, for which I shall be unremitting in my labors to compensate. But if the good people in their wisdom shall see fit to keep me in the background, I have been too familiar with disappointments to be very much chagrined.”

³⁰⁹ “An act to regulate the interest of Money,” Illinois Revised Laws, 8th General Assembly (Vandalia: 1833),

Lincoln's ambition, like that of many politicians, was rooted in an intense craving for deference and approval.³¹⁰ But unlike many power-seekers, Lincoln was expansive and generous in his ambition.³¹¹ He desired more than ego-gratifying power and prestige; he wanted everyone to have a chance to escape the soul-crushing poverty and backwardness that he had experienced as a quasi-slave on the frontier.³¹² In 1852, he ascribed to the recently deceased Henry Clay his own feelings: "Mr. Clay's predominant sentiment, from first to last, was a deep devotion to the cause of human liberty – a strong sympathy with the oppressed every where, and an ardent wish for their elevation. With him, this was a primary and all controlling passion."³¹³ That description fits Lincoln as well as it did Clay. From first to last, Lincoln's political goal was to free the oppressed, starting with the kind of frontier people whose conditions he knew first-hand; in time, the scope of his sympathies would broaden.

To forward these principles, Lincoln had to campaign hard in late July and early August. In those weeks, he stumped the huge county, delivering speeches and socializing with the electorate. His first address of the 1832 campaign was given at Pappsville, a hamlet eleven miles southwest of New Salem.³¹⁴ An auditor remembered that it went something like this: "Fellow citizens, I suppose you all know who I am. I am humble Abraham Lincoln. I have been solicited by many friends to become a candidate for the Legislature. My politics

348-50.

³¹⁰ Harold D. Lasswell, Power and Personality (New York: Norton, 1948), 38, 39. See below, chapter six, for a fuller discussion of the roots of Lincoln's ambition.

³¹¹ Lincoln's ambition, as Don E. Fehrenbacher observed, was "notably free of pettiness, malice, and overindulgence. It was, moreover, an ambition leavened by moral conviction and a deep faith in the principles upon which the republic had been built." Fehrenbacher, Prelude to Greatness: Lincoln in the 1850s (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 161.

³¹² See Allen C. Guelzo, Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1999), 26-63, and Gabor S. Boritt, Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1978), 275-87.

³¹³ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:126.

are short and sweet, like the old woman’s dance. I am in favor of a national bank. I am in favor of the internal-improvement system and a high protective tariff. These are my sentiments and political principles. If elected I shall be thankful; if not it will be all the same.”³¹⁵ Unlike Lincoln’s March statement, this speech, as remembered decades after its delivery, did not touch on public education or usury laws.

Just before he spoke, Lincoln quelled a fight. J. Rowan Herndon was whipping Jesse Dodson, whose friends intervened unfairly. Lincoln pitched in, throwing Dodson’s allies about as if they were mere boys. He caught one of them “by the Nape of the neck and a[ss] of the breeches and toss[ed] him 10 or 12 feet, Easily.” This decisive action won him many friends.³¹⁶

Fighting was not uncommon at Illinois political events. In the early 1830s, whenever all candidates had finished speaking at a rally, “then commenced the drinking of liquor, and long before night a large portion of the voters would be drunk and staggering about town, cursing, swearing, hallooing, yelling, huzzaing for their favorite candidates, throwing their arms up and around, threatening to fight, and fighting.” Governor Thomas A. Ford saw “hundreds of such persons in the town of Springfield Towards evening they would mount their ponies, go reeling from side to side, galloping through town, and throwing up their caps and hats, screeching like so many infernal spirits broke loose from their nether prison.”³¹⁷ Describing the 1832 canvas in Sangamon County, Stephen T. Logan said that the

³¹⁴ Thomas F. Schwartz, “Finding the Missing Link: A Promissory Note and the Lost Town of Pappsville” (pamphlet; Historical Bulletin number 51; Racine: Lincoln Fellowship of Wisconsin, 1996), 8.

³¹⁵ Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 5 November 1864. According to the Journal, Lincoln “cut his remarks short” because the sun had almost set. Several other speakers had preceded him. See James A. Herndon to William H. Herndon, Quincy, Illinois, 29 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 16-17, and Abner Y. Ellis, statement for Herndon, enclosed in Ellis to Herndon, Moro, Illinois, 23 January 1866, ibid., 170.

³¹⁶ James A. Herndon, interview with William H. Herndon, [1865-6], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 460; J. Rowan Herndon to William H. Herndon, Quincy, Illinois, 21 June 1865, ibid., 51.

³¹⁷ Ford, History of Illinois, ed. Davis, 68-69.

voters had “a good many fights at the groceries. Two gangs of bullies used to meet here [in Springfield] and fight one another. One was from Lick Creek, and the other from Spring Creek. I had seen a good deal of that sort of thing in Kentucky, and was somewhat used to it, but a stranger would have considered this a pretty hard country.”³¹⁸

Lincoln poked fun at his own odd appearance. On one occasion he mockingly observed: “Fellow Citizens: I have been told that some of my opponents have said that it was a disgrace to the County of Sangamon to have such a looking man as I am stuck up for the Legislature. Now I thought this was a free country. That is the reason that I address you today. Had I known to the contrary I should not have consented to run.”³¹⁹ Henry McHenry heard Lincoln make a similar statement in the 1832 canvass: “Gentlemen I have just returned from the Campaign. My personal appearance is rather shabby & dark. I am almost as red as those men I have been chasing through the prairies & forests [and] on the Rivers of Illinois.”³²⁰ In fact, he did appear ungainly on the stump, as Stephen T. Logan reported: while addressing a crowd in Springfield, the candidate seemed “a very tall and gawky and rough looking fellow then – his pantaloons didn’t meet his shoes by six inches.” But Logan soon forgot about Lincoln’s appearance: “after he began speaking I became very much interested in him. He made a very sensible speech. It was the time when [Thomas Hart] Benton was running his theory of a gold circulation. Lincoln was attacking Benton’s theory and I thought did it very well. The manner of Mr. Lincoln’s speech then was very much the same as his speeches in after life – that is the same peculiar characteristics were apparent then, though of

³¹⁸ S. T. Logan, interviewed by John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 6 July 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 35.

³¹⁹ J. Rowan Herndon to William H. Herndon, 28 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 7. I have modernized the spelling and punctuation in this quote.

³²⁰ Henry McHenry, interview with Herndon, 29 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 15.

course in after years he evinced both more knowledge and experience. But he had then the same novelty and the same peculiarity in presenting his ideas. He had the same individuality that he kept up through all his life.”³²¹

In the 1830s, campaigning could be a grim experience. Local candidates often spoke to audiences of no more than twenty to thirty at social events like shooting matches or house raisings. Even smaller audiences would attend evening meetings at log schools, illuminated by a few candles. Candidates were hard pressed to overcome the deadening effects of such gloomy surroundings. They tried to do so with wit, humor, and the use of vigorous, colloquial rhetoric and punchy arguments.³²²

During the 1832 canvass, Lincoln declared that if he were defeated he would try and try again: “when I have been a candidate before you some 5 or 6 times and have been beaten every time I will consider it a disgrace and will be sure never to try it again.”³²³ He did lose, finishing eighth in a field of thirteen (only the top four vote-getters won legislative seats.)³²⁴ This was, he stated in 1859, “the only time I ever had been beaten by the people.”³²⁵ His showing was respectable, considering that few voters outside New Salem recognized his name. Jason Duncan recalled that “So little was Known of Mr Lincoln by the inhabitants of Sangamon at the time he first became a candidate for the legislature that when a few miles out of town in my rides [I] would be asked who Abraham was,” for most people “had never

³²¹ S. T. Logan, interviewed by John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 6 July 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 35.

³²² Nicolay, “Lincoln’s Literary Experiments,” The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine, April 1894, p. 825.

³²³ J. Rowan Herndon to William H. Herndon, Quincy, Illinois, 28 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 7. I have modernized spelling and punctuation in this quote.

³²⁴ Lincoln received 657 votes, while the four winning candidates received 1127, 991, 945, and 815 votes respectively. Theodore Calvin Pease, ed., Illinois Election Returns, 1818-1848 (Springfield: Lincoln Presidential Library, 1923), 262.

³²⁵ Autobiography enclosed in Lincoln to Jesse W. Fell, Springfield, 20 December 1859, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:512.

heard of such a man. then when I would tell them who he was some few responded and said I believe that is the man who went to Orleans on a hog boat for Offett. I replied in the affirmative, and would recommend him to their consideration not as a tried politician but a young man of extraordinary talents for one of his opportunities.”³²⁶ In explaining Lincoln’s defeat, John Todd Stuart noted that “Sangamon county was at that time very large It was an immense territory to travel over, and it was utterly impossible to get over every part of it in a ten days’ campaign.”³²⁷ According to Henry C. Whitney, “responsible” voters “could not seriously believe that so ill-dressed and fresh a spectacle” as Lincoln “could decently represent this important and populous county.”³²⁸

But in New Salem, Lincoln did astonishingly well, winning 277 of the 300 votes cast, whereas his candidate for president, Henry Clay, lost that precinct by 115 votes.³²⁹ Jason Duncan said “such was his personal popularity that he obtained a majority, verry many Jackson men of the most violent party feelings voting for him, on the grounds they believed him an honest and worthy young man.”³³⁰ Stuart ascribed Lincoln’s success at the New Salem polls not only to “personal popularity”; in addition, “the New Salem people were already then interested in a project for getting themselves set apart into a new County (afterwards Menard Co.) and Lincoln being their local candidate they expected to make him

³²⁶ Jason Duncan to Herndon, [late 1866-early 1867], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 541-42.

³²⁷ John Todd Stuart, interview with John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 23 June 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 10.

³²⁸ Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 100.

³²⁹ Sangamon County Commissioners, Court Records, New Salem Poll Books, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield; autobiography written for John L. Scripps, [ca. June 1860], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:64.

³³⁰ Jason Duncan to Herndon, [late 1866-early 1867], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 540.

instrumental in bringing this about.”³³¹ Also swelling Lincoln’s vote in New Salem was the enmity between one of his rivals, the Methodist minister Peter Cartwright, and Samuel Hill, the leading merchant of the village. Johnny Watkins recollected that “whenever the preacher wanted an office Sam Hill ‘was agin him,’” and even though Hill was “the awfullest Democrat as ever was, a terrible strong Democrat,” he “voted for Lincoln, and worked for him, [and] did everything he could for him.”³³²

Despite his loss, Lincoln found the result “highly gratifying,” according to Robert B. Rutledge, who said that the young candidate’s showing “astonished even his most ardent admirers.”³³³ His skeptical comrades, including James Matheny, discovered that “Lincoln knew what he was about and that he had running qualities.”³³⁴ Stuart maintained that “Lincoln in this race . . . acquired a reputation for candor and honesty, as well as for ability in speech-making. He made friends everywhere he went – he ran on the square – and thereby acquired the respect and confidence of everybody. . . . Everybody who became acquainted with him in this campaign of 1832, learned to rely on him with the most implicit confidence.”³³⁵

FRONTIER MERCHANT, POSTMASTER, SURVEYOR

³³¹ John Todd Stuart, interview with John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 23 June 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 10-11.

³³² Reminiscences of John Watkins, paraphrased by Thomas P. Reep, based on an interview conducted by Reep in 1890, in Reep’s interview with Joseph F. Booton, Petersburg, Illinois, 18 October 1934, typescript, pp. 38-39, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. On Hill’s enmity toward Cartwright, see Douglas L. Wilson, Lincoln before Washington: New Perspectives on the Illinois Years (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 58-59, and Robert Bray, Peter Cartwright: Legendary Frontier Preacher (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 143.

³³³ Robert B. Rutledge to Herndon, [ca. November 1866], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 385.

³³⁴ Matheny told this to Henry Clay Whitney. Whitney, Life on the Circuit, ed. Angle, 56.

³³⁵ John Todd Stuart, interview with John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 23 June 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 10-11.

Two years had to pass before Lincoln could run again. He would take the advice he later gave to an unsuccessful candidate for office: “You must pick your flint and try it again.”³³⁶ Meanwhile, he found himself, as he put it, “without means and out of business” but “anxious to remain with his friends who had treated him with so much generosity, especially as he had nothing elsewhere to go to. He studied what he should do – thought of learning the black-smith trade – thought of trying to study law – rather thought he could not succeed at that without a better education. Before long, strangely enough, a man offered to sell and did sell, to A[braham] and another as poor as himself, an old stock of goods upon credit.”³³⁷ So once again Lincoln worked in a store, now as a co-owner rather than a clerk.

On the frontier, village stores served as intellectual and social centers as well as places of business.³³⁸ As a Missouri merchant who ran a store in the 1830s explained, he and his compeers “constitute a distinct class of society. This class is not only important from its numbers, but powerful and influential from its intelligence, enterprise, and wealth.” A merchant “is a general locum tenens, the agent of everybody! And familiar with every transaction in his neighborhood. He is a counselor without license, and yet invariably consulted, not only in matters of business, but in domestic affairs.” All news, “not only local, but from a distance, – as he is frequently the postmaster, and the only subscriber to the

³³⁶ Reminiscences of Robert H. Osborne, quoting Lincoln’s words in January 1861, Lerna, Illinois, Eagle, Lincoln anniversary issue, 1928.

³³⁷ Autobiography written for John Locke Scripps, [ca. June 1860], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:64-65.

³³⁸ J. McCan Davis, “Lincoln as a Storekeeper,” Los Angeles Times, 30 June 1895; Atherton, Pioneer Merchant.

newspaper – has general dissemination from his establishment, as from a common center; and thither all resort, at least once a week, both for goods and intelligence.”³³⁹

Lincoln’s partner was William Franklin Berry, the son of John M. Berry, a Cumberland Presbyterian minister.³⁴⁰ Earlier in 1832, Berry, two years Lincoln’s junior, had bought a half-interest in a store from James Herndon.³⁴¹ A few weeks thereafter, Berry’s partner, J. Rowan Herndon, sold out to Lincoln on credit. Herndon explained that Lincoln “was so thoroughly honest . . . I accepted his note in payment of the whole. He had no money, but I would have advanced him still more had he asked for it.”³⁴² Following the August election, Berry and Lincoln opened with the stock already on hand, which they supplemented with goods, including whiskey, purchased from Henry Inco and James A. Rutledge after their store had failed. In a back room, merchants usually kept a whiskey barrel, with a tin cup dangling from its side, for thirsty customers.³⁴³

In January 1833, Lincoln and Berry added still more merchandise to their shelves when they acquired the inventory of a competitor, Reuben Radford, whose store had been vandalized by the Clary’s Grove boys. Offended by the refusal of Radford’s clerk to serve them more than two rounds of drinks, they laid waste to the premises. The store “looked like a blizzard had gone through it. The door was gone, and the windows were smashed in, and the floor was covered with glass and a mixture of most everything.” William G. Greene,

³³⁹ John Beauchamp Jones, The Western Merchant (Philadelphia: Grigg, Elliot, 1849), quoted in Atherton, Pioneer Merchant, 7.

³⁴⁰ William F. Berry’s twenty-four years of life are recounted in Zarel C. Spears and Robert S. Barton, Berry and Lincoln, Frontier Merchants: The Store that “Winked Out” (New York: Stratford House, 1947), 16-100. See also William Elwood Berry, The Berry Patch (Decatur, Illinois: privately published, 1976).

³⁴¹ The terms are unknown, but since no records of a mortgage or other loan survive, it may be inferred that Berry probably paid cash, perhaps with his patrimony for which he would have been eligible that year. Spears and Barton, Berry and Lincoln, 11-12.

³⁴² J. Rowan Herndon to William Herndon, Quincy, Illinois, 28 October 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 378; Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 77.

owner of that store, fortuitously encountered his tenant Radford just after the Clary's Grove gang had struck. Greene told a journalist: "my! how that man [Radford] did swear and race round."³⁴⁴ (Radford was described by contemporaries as "a hot-headed man," a "vile slanderer," and a "blustering – crazy fool.")³⁴⁵ From him Greene, who was known as "slicky Bill" because of his "sly schemes for making money, without working for it," bought the remaining merchandise for \$400.³⁴⁶ Fearing that he may have paid too much, he was chagrined until Lincoln came along and said, "Cheer up, Billy, it's a good thing; we will take an inventory." Not understanding exactly what an inventory was, and fearing that the Clary's Grove boys had committed one, Greene replied: "No more inventories for me."³⁴⁷ Lincoln and Berry then offered \$650 for the goods and the store, a more substantial building than the one they had been occupying.³⁴⁸ Greene accepted the offer gladly.

That same month Berry and Lincoln applied for a license to sell liquor by the glass.³⁴⁹ Daniel Green Burner, who clerked in the store, recalled dispensing drinks for six

³⁴³ Atherton, Pioneer Merchant, 15.

³⁴⁴ William G. Greene, interviewed by George A. Pierce, correspondence dated "on the cars," 12 April, Chicago Inter-Ocean, 30 April 1881; Greene interviewed by Paul Hull, "Another Lincoln Tale," New York Mail and Express, 1 February 1896, p. 11.

³⁴⁵ Greene interviewed by Paul Hull, "Another Lincoln Tale," New York Mail and Express, 1 February 1896, p. 11; William Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 13 June 1888, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress. For a sketch of Radford, see McKenzie, "A Demographic Study of Select New Salem Precinct Residents," 90-99.

³⁴⁶ John Hill to Ida M. Tarbell, Columbus, Georgia, 17 February 1896, Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College; Zarel Spears to Robert Barton, Bedford Hills, N.Y., 8 July [1938], Robert S. Barton Papers, University of Illinois; Clark E. Carr, The Illini: A Story of the Prairies (9th ed.; Chicago: McClurg, 1920), 48; Greene interviewed by Paul Hull, "Another Lincoln Tale," New York Mail and Express, 1 February 1896, p. 11.

³⁴⁷ Greene, interview with J. W. S., Chicago Tribune, n.d., copied in the Petersburg Observer (Illinois), 23 August 1884; William G. Greene, interviewed by George A. Pierce, correspondence dated "on the cars," 12 April, Chicago Inter-Ocean, 30 April 1881.

³⁴⁸ Barton and Spears, Berry and Lincoln, 21-45; William G. Greene to Herndon, 24 October 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 377.

³⁴⁹ Wayne C. Temple, "Lincoln's Tavern License," Lincoln Herald 82 (1980): 463-64. The receipt for \$6, issued by the treasurer of Sangamon County, was dated 4 January 1833. This document evidently served as a

cents apiece.³⁵⁰ (Burner and several other New Sailemites cast doubt on Lincoln’s claim, made in his 1858 debates with Stephen A. Douglas, that “Lincoln never kept a grocery [saloon] anywhere in the world.” Lincoln might have quibbling, for his statement could be interpreted to mean that he never presided over a store where liquor was the main product sold.)³⁵¹ In May, the partners bought more goods from a Beardstown firm.³⁵² In light of their continued purchases, it is not surprising that Lincoln and Berry “did nothing but get deeper and deeper in debt,” as Lincoln put it. Eventually, he said, the business “winked out.”³⁵³ Contributing to its failure was the “negligence & bad management” of Berry, who was “a hard drinker,” a “wild fellow” of “dissolute habits,” and “very trifling.”³⁵⁴ He died in

virtual license to sell liquor on the premises; on March 6 the Sangamon County Commissioners Court officially accredited Berry and Lincoln as tavern-keepers.

³⁵⁰ Temple, ed., “Burners in New Salem,” 66; Tarbell, Early Life of Lincoln, 172;

Menard County Axis (Petersburg), n.d., copied in the Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican, 22 June 1860.

³⁵¹ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:16. James McGrady Rutledge, who visited the store many times, recalled that there were “two rooms, and in the small back room they kept their whiskey.” John Potter stated that it “was a grocery and they sold whiskey of course.” Mrs. Parthena Hill recollected that Lincoln and Berry “had a grocery, and I have always understood that they sold whiskey.” Tarbell, Early Life of Lincoln, 172-73. A Mrs. Potter (probably Mrs. Ned Potter) made this point to George Spears. Spears to Herndon, Tallula, Illinois, 3 November 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 393. An early historian of the New Salem area stated that “it is a fact, conceded by all, that intoxicants were sold by them [Lincoln and Berry], as was the case in all grocery stores in those times.” Miller, Past and Present of Menard County, 43. James Davis denied it in an 1866 interview with Herndon: “Came to Clary’s grove in 1829. Knew Lincoln well – Knew Jim & Row Herndon – They sold out to Berry – one of them did – afterwards the other sold out to Lincoln – the Store was a mixed one – dry goods, a few, groceries such as Sugar Salt &c – and whiskey – solely Kept for their Customers – or to sell by the Gallon – quart or pint – not otherwise – . The Herndon’s probably had the blankenship goods – Radford had a grocery Store – salt, pepper & such like things – with whiskey. It is said Green bought this out & instantly sold to Lincoln & Berry – Lincoln & Berry broke – Berry subsequently Kept a doggery – a whiskey saloon, as I do now or did – Am a democrat – never agreed in politics with Abe: he was an honest man. Give the devil his due: he never sold whiskey by the dram in New Salem. I was in town every week for years – Know I think, all about it – I always drank my drams & drank at Berry’s often – ought to Know – Lincoln got involved, as I think in the first operation.” Davis, interview with Herndon, [1866], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 529-30.

³⁵² Schwartz, “Finding the Missing Link,” 7-9.

³⁵³ Autobiography written for John Locke Scripps, [ca. June 1860], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:65.

³⁵⁴ William G. Greene, interview with Herndon, Elm Wood, Illinois, 30 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 20; Temple, ed., “Burners in New Salem,” 66; Ross, Lincoln’s First Years in Illinois, 19-22; William G. Greene, interview with J. W. S., Chicago Tribune, n.d., copied in the Petersburg Observer (Illinois), 23 August 1884; Menard County Axis, n.d., copied in the Belleville Advocate, 29 June 1860; William G. Greene, interview with James Q. Howard, [May 1860], Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

January, 1835, apparently of tuberculosis “resulting from his wild dissipation,” according to his sin-hating, prohibitionist father, who allegedly preached a temperance sermon rather than a eulogy for his son.³⁵⁵ (George Spears wondered “why a man of Mr Lincolns integrity would enter in to partnership with such a caractor.”)³⁵⁶ Zarel C. Spears, after conducting research in Illinois archives and interviewing descendents of Berry and other New Salemites, concluded that Lincoln and Berry “drifted along – buying unwisely, and selling unwisely; didn’t keep their stocks up; had too much cash tied up in slow merchandise; and too much credit; they could not collect from their friends; and gradually the stock became a jumble of ill-assorted merchandise.”³⁵⁷ The Lincoln and Berry store also suffered from competition when an “opposition liquor shop attracted the custom.”³⁵⁸

Charles Maltby remembered that the store failed not only because Berry was “wild and dissipated,” but also because “the goods purchased were old and unsalable.” Compounding matters was Lincoln’s business ineptitude. His heart, said Maltby, “was too full of the milk of human kindness to refuse credit, even to those that he had reason to believe would never be able to pay. He had no tact for the collection of store bills, and to compel the payment from his friends and neighbors by law – the thought for a moment could

³⁵⁵ Arthur Smedley, grandson of Berry’s sister, Mary Harriet Berry Spears, told this to Zarel C. Spears. Spears to Robert S. Barton, Ottawa, Kansas, 10 August 1938, Robert S. Barton Papers, University of Illinois. Spears and Barton deny that he spoke harshly of his son at the funeral service. Berry and Lincoln, 99. According to a historian of the Cumberland Presbyterian church, “There was one thing which seemed to trouble him [John Berry] more than all else, and that was a son, who became dissipated. Mr. Berry was much from home, and it appears that while not under the immediate eye of his father, the son acquired a taste for strong drink. This, with its attendant evils, gave the parents much anxiety, and even anguish of mind.” J. B. Logan, History of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Illinois (Alton: Perrin & Smith, 1878), 155.

³⁵⁶ George Spears to Herndon, Tallula, Illinois, 17 October 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 375. For a biographical sketch of Spears (1805-92), see McKenzie, “A Demographic Study of Select New Salem Precinct Residents,” 103-6.

³⁵⁷ Undated memo enclosed in Spears to Robert S. Barton, Bedford Hills, N.Y., 8 March 1939, Robert S. Barton Papers, University of Illinois.

³⁵⁸ John Hill, “A Romance of Reality,” Petersburg, Illinois, Menard Axis, 15 February 1862, in Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 24.

not be entertained.”³⁵⁹ Henry C. Whitney, who knew William G. Greene well, asserted that “Lincoln did, indeed, attend perfunctorily to the wants of the customers, but he brought no enthusiasm or commercial talent to the work, and while engaged in waiting on customers, he was quite apt to be diverted by something he ‘was put in mind of’ or by some scientific or educational diversion, during the consideration of which, business in the store would cease or languish: and when females would seek to trade at the counter of Berry & Lincoln, the junior partner would retire out of sight and leave them to be imperfectly ministered unto by the bibulous Berry, all to the detriment, & finally, extinction of their trade.”³⁶⁰ Whitney added that Lincoln “was rigidly honest as to money matters and to representations made in the course of trade. He would not dissemble, color the truth, or excite a customer’s desire to buy unnecessarily or beyond his means; he frankly told good customers that the very whiskey which he drew for them would prove their ruin, and that the tobacco which he dealt out was nasty and unfit for use. If he knew nothing of the merits or quality of goods under review he frankly said so.”³⁶¹

With Berry’s death in 1835, Lincoln’s debts increased, reaching approximately \$1,100.³⁶² “That debt was the greatest obstacle I have ever met in life,” he told a friend. “I

³⁵⁹ Maltby, Lincoln, 39.

³⁶⁰ Henry C. Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, manuscript, p. 116, Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee. The quoted passage does not appear in the published version of Whitney’s biography.

³⁶¹ Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 91-92.

³⁶² The story of Lincoln’s debts is tangled. Among them was a note for \$105 dating from October 1832. Nelson Alley bought goods from the owner of the Talisman and gave a note which Lincoln guaranteed (judgment against Lincoln was entered on 13 September 1833). In addition, there were several others, including a \$250 note dated 29 April 1833 to E. C. Blankinship (secured by a mortgage on William E. Berry’s lot opposite the second Berry and Lincoln store); a note dated 10 October 1833 of Lincoln, William G. Greene, and William F. Berry to Reuben Radford for \$380, of which \$175 had been paid by April 1834; a note for \$58 dated January 1834 to Thomas Watkins for a horse; and a note for \$56.09 to the merchants Knapp & Pogue. In April 1834, Peter Van Bergen, a land speculator and money lender, foreclosed on the Radford note (net of \$205) in which he had acquired part interest in March. Pratt, Personal Finances of Lincoln, 11-17; Schwartz, “The Missing Link,” 9-17; Spears and Barton, Berry and Lincoln, 110-21; New Salem Legal Collection, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

had no way of speculating, and could not earn money except by labor, and to earn by labor eleven hundred dollars, besides my living, seemed the work of a lifetime. There was, however, but one way. I went to the creditors and told them that if they would let me alone, I would give them all I could earn, over my living, as fast as I could earn it.”³⁶³ As late as 1860, Lincoln was being dunned for payment of these New Salem debts.³⁶⁴ According to Herndon, “although of easy disposition, the debt galled him and hastened his wrinkles.”³⁶⁵

While struggling to pay off his debts, Lincoln had few other expenses. His rent was minimal; at first he slept for free in Offutt’s store and took his meals with John M. Camron, who charged him one dollar per week.³⁶⁶ Later he paid the same fee for room and board at Isaac Burner’s.³⁶⁷ Lincoln lodged at the second Lincoln-Berry store even after it “winked

³⁶³ Leonard Swett in Rice, ed. Reminiscences of Lincoln, 465-66. See also Pratt, Finances of Lincoln, 3-24; Wayne C. Temple, “Lincoln and Bennett: The Story of a Store Account,” Lincoln Herald 69 (1967): 107-15; a letter by L. R. W. [perhaps Robert L. Wilson], Peoria, 25 June 1860, Cleveland Leader, n.d., copied in the New York Tribune, 9 July 1860.

³⁶⁴ E. C. Blankinship wrote Lincoln in 1860 saying: “in over looking my old claims I find due me in judgment a note assigned me by Lincoln & Berry on Trent 15th march 1836 \$148.22 and last paid by me \$14.12 nothing could at any time be made out of the Trents Martin died some years before I left Springfield insolvent as his Farther told me since I left Springfield the last ten or twelve years my buisness has been mostly in the hands of agents and my old claims of whitch I have large amt have not had much attention. I hope you will find it convenient to let me have this amt and interest by return mail shoud you not have the amt at hand you can no doubt make arrangements with Bunn or Ridgley to draw on an Alton Bank or St Louis for the amt at sixty or ninty days ading the Interest at 10 pr cent as I should have to pay that amt to raise the money. I should prefer a bill at sight if you find it convenient I send statement below of the amt you can refer however to the judgment.” Blankinship to Lincoln, Upper Alton, 12 September 1860, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁶⁵ Herndon interviewed by George Alfred Townsend, Springfield correspondence, 25 January, New York Tribune, 15 February 1867. It is not clear how long it took Lincoln to pay off this debt. It is often alleged that he did not do so until 1847, but Harry Pratt has argued that he probably did so much earlier. Pratt, Personal Finances of Lincoln, 15. One source who seems to have known Lincoln well and heard from him stories about his early life, stated flatly that during his first two terms in the Illinois legislature, Lincoln “saved money enough during those four years [1834-38] to pay off all his \$1,100 indebtedness, even to the last farthing.” Letter by L. R. W. [perhaps Robert L. Wilson], Peoria, 25 June 1860, Cleveland Leader, n.d., copied in the New York Tribune, 9 July 1860.

³⁶⁶ William G. Greene, interview with James Q. Howard, [May 1860], Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Mrs. Vienna Lyster, daughter of John M. Camron, interviewed in the Los Angeles Times, 2 October 1904. Some authorities spell the name “Cameron,” but John M. signed documents “Camron,” and on both his and his son’s tombstone appears the shortened form of the surname. His grandson, William Camron, also used the shortened form. Julia A. Drake, Flame o’ Dawn: The Story of Reverend John M. Camron, Who Boarded Lincoln at New Salem (New York: Vantage, 1959), 5, 213.

³⁶⁷ Temple, ed., “Lincoln and the Burners,” 67.

out.”³⁶⁸ When he roomed with James Short, Lincoln paid two dollars week.³⁶⁹ Mrs. Parthena Hill recalled that “Board was \$1.00 – \$1.50 – washing about \$1.00 – \$1.25 per month – didn’t cost much to live, I assure you.”³⁷⁰ During his five and a half years in New Salem, Lincoln stayed with Caleb Carman, James Rutledge, Isaac Burner, the Camron family, and the cooper, Henry Onstot.³⁷¹ He also lived with J. Rowan Herndon until that gentleman (perhaps accidentally) shot his wife to death in 1833.³⁷² Lincoln then moved to the outskirts of the village to Mentor Graham’s home for six months.³⁷³ Graham’s hospitality might have been inspired in part by an episode that had occurred the previous autumn, when the schoolmaster’s family was taken sick. As Graham recalled, his seven-year-old daughter Ellen, “a great favorite with Lincoln,” was especially ill. Unable to tolerate milk, she needed bread, which Graham could not afford. As Graham admitted, “I was proud, too proud to tell the actual condition we were in. As I walked back to the street [from the mill], my sack on my arm and my head down, thinking over my sad lot, and the disappointment there would be

³⁶⁸ T. G. Onstot was the source of this information. Sue E. Onstot to Charles W. McLellan, Forest City, Illinois, 15 August 1907, manuscript filed in a copy of Onstot, Pioneers of Menard and Mason Counties, McLellan Collection, Brown University.

³⁶⁹ Short paraphrased in Erastus Wright to J. G. Holland, Springfield, 11 July 1865, Holland Papers, New York Public Library.

³⁷⁰ Parthena Hill, interviews with Herndon, [March 1887?], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 605, and with Walter B. Stevens, 1886, in Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 9.

³⁷¹ Caleb Carman to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 30 November 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 429; Robert B. Rutledge to Herndon, [ca. 1 November 1866], ibid., 382; Sue E. Onstot (granddaughter of Henry Onstot) to James R. B. Van Cleave, Forest City, Illinois, 17 March 1909, Harry E. Pratt Papers, University of Illinois; unidentified clipping, dated Petersburg, Illinois, 29 July, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana. This unidentified article is based on an interview with Onstot’s grandson, J. N. Onstot. Lincoln boarded with Onstot “for two years or more.” Sue E. Onstot to Charles W. McLellan, Forest City, Illinois, 15 August 1907, manuscript filed in a copy of Onstot, Pioneers of Menard and Mason Counties, McLellan Collection, Brown University.

³⁷² James A. Herndon to William H. Herndon, Quincy, Illinois, 29 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 16; reminiscences of John Watkins, paraphrased by Thomas P. Reep, based on interview conducted by Reep in 1890, in Reep’s interview with Joseph F. Booton, Petersburg, Illinois, 18 October 1934, typescript, pp. 25-26, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

at home, my little girl's wan face uprose before me, and tears gathered in my eyes, falling thick and fast. Just then I had something touch my hand, and looking down, there lay a ten dollar bill. Turning quickly, I saw Lincoln slipping into his office door, glancing furtively toward me."³⁷⁴

Lincoln also roomed at the tavern of Nelson Alley, another beneficiary of his generosity.³⁷⁵ After moving to Springfield from New Salem in 1837, Lincoln heard that his former landlord, who had once lent him money, was incarcerated in a poorhouse.³⁷⁶

According to Philip Clark, "Lincoln went in person and had him taken from the county house and given another home." Such actions showed, according to Clark, that gratitude "was a religion with him."³⁷⁷

³⁷³ Mentor Graham to Herndon (interview), Petersburg, Illinois, 29 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 10; Caleb Carman to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 30 November 1866, ibid., 429; Mentor Graham to B. F. Irwin, 12 March 1874, Duncan and Nickols, Mentor Graham, 228-29.

³⁷⁴ Bloomington Leader, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 2 March 1870. A different version of Graham's story appeared in James Q. Howard's 1860 campaign biography of Lincoln: "I was unable for several weeks to do any work, and we were without means and in much distress. I was walking past Lincoln's boarding-house one day when he came out and asked me about the family. I told him my little girl was dead. He appeared much affected. When I came back he handed me ten dollars, probably all the money he had in the world. I had not asked him for any and did not suppose he knew that I needed it." Howard, The Life of Abraham Lincoln with Extracts from His Speeches (Columbus: Follett, Foster, 1860), 22. Howard had interviewed Graham in May 1860, though his notes contain nothing about this episode. Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. Graham's daughter Nancy Ellen said that in New Salem, Lincoln gave the family money when they were in financial trouble. Duncan and Nikols, Mentor Graham, 161.

³⁷⁵ Hardin Bale, interview with Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 29 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 13; Caleb Carman to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 30 November 1866, ibid., 429; James Short to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 7 July 1865, ibid., 74; Abner Y. Ellis, statement for Herndon, enclosed in Ellis to Herndon, Moro, Illinois, 23 January 1866, ibid., 170. Alley's tavern had been previously owned by James Rutledge and then by Henry Onstot. For a biographical sketch of Alley, see McKenzie, "A Demographic Study of Select New Salem Precinct Residents," 172-78.

³⁷⁶ In 1842, Alley declared bankruptcy. Eighteen years later, the census indicated that he owned no real estate and personal possessions valued at a mere \$15. McKenzie, "A Demographic Study of Select New Salem Precinct Residents," 177-78.

³⁷⁷ Reminiscences of Philip Clark, in the Mattoon, Illinois, correspondence, 13 March, Chicago Times-Herald, 14 March 1897. Philip Clark (1812?-97) served in Jacob Ebey's company during the Black Hawk War. Whitney, ed., Black Hawk War, 1:220. He lived in Neal's Grove, near Rochester, in the vicinity of Springfield. Reminiscences of O. C. Stafford, unidentified clipping, George Pasfield Scrapbook, p. 205, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. After unsuccessfully running for delegate to the 1847 Illinois State Constitutional Convention, Clark went to California briefly during the 1849 gold rush. He was involved in the 1837 contest

Lincoln “was proverbial for his benevolence, always giving something of what he possessed to charitable objects.”³⁷⁸ One cold winter day he offered to help a barefoot youngster who was chopping wood in order to earn money for shoes. Lincoln told the lad “to go in and warm [up] and he would chop a while for him. The boy delayed a little, but Lincoln finished the work, threw down his axe and told him to go and buy the shoes.”³⁷⁹ He also chopped wood and performed other chores for widows and orphans.³⁸⁰ When he saw travelers bogged down, Lincoln stopped to help them, despite the taunts of his friends, who said: “Now Lincoln don’t make a d—d fool of yourself.”³⁸¹

In May 1833, while struggling to make ends meet, Lincoln had the good fortune to become postmaster of New Salem, a job he held until that post office closed three years later. He was one of the few people in the village who could manage the paperwork. Postmasters had to record all post-bills (which accompanied every letter) and make quarterly reports to Washington.³⁸² When Lincoln was notified of his appointment, John Allen “[n]ever saw a man better pleased” because, “as he said, he would then have access to all the News papers.”³⁸³ The postmastership had previously been held by the storekeeper Samuel Hill, who neglected his postal patrons in favor of the customers for his merchandise (including liquor). Several women, indignant at being forced to wait while toppers were served, petitioned to

between Lincoln and James Adams. In 1818, his father, also named Philip Clark (1787-1853), settled in Rochester, where he established a saw mill and a flour mill. In 1850, he was an innkeeper.

³⁷⁸ Jason Duncan to Herndon, [late 1866-early 1867], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 541.

³⁷⁹ Robert B. Rutledge to Herndon, [ca. November 1866], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 385.

³⁸⁰ J. Rowan Herndon to Herndon, 28 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 7.

³⁸¹ George H. Barrett, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 436. James Taylor told a variation of this story in which that recipient of Lincoln’s kindness was a member of the Watkins family. Taylor, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], ibid., 482.

³⁸² Benjamin P. Thomas, “Lincoln the Postmaster,” Bulletin of the Abraham Lincoln Association 31 (1933): 5.

³⁸³ Allen, interview with James Q. Howard, [May 1860], Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

have Lincoln replace Hill.³⁸⁴ Ossian M. Ross, postmaster at Havana, reviewed the petition, noted that it was signed by leading citizens, and forwarded it with his endorsement to Washington.³⁸⁵ Jason Duncan helped organize this move to oust Hill, despite Lincoln's objections "on the ground that he did not want the then incumbent Supplanted." But Duncan, out of concern for the public interest, preferred charges nonetheless, leading to Hill's resignation and Lincoln's appointment by the Jackson administration, which did not hold Lincoln's Whiggery against him.³⁸⁶ (As Lincoln explained, the "office was too insignificant, to make his politics an objection.")³⁸⁷ Nelson Alley and Alexander Trent guaranteed the mandatory \$500 bond.³⁸⁸

Lincoln's duties were light, for the mail came but twice a week. When calling for their letters and periodicals, customers paid the postmaster (there were no stamps in those days), and sometimes Lincoln advanced the amount due.³⁸⁹ When George Spears, the beneficiary of such an advance, demanded a receipt for a newspaper, Lincoln replied impatiently: "At your request, I send you a receipt for the postage on your paper. I am somewhat surprised at your request. I will however comply with it. The law requires News paper postage to be paid in advance and now that I have waited a full year you choose to wound my feelings by insinuating that unless you get a receipt I will probably make you pay it again."³⁹⁰ Spears had sent the money to Lincoln "by one whom he thought might 'forget' to give it" to

³⁸⁴ Reep, Lincoln at New Salem, 57.

³⁸⁵ Onstot, Pioneers of Menard and Mason Counties, 87-88.

³⁸⁶ Jason Duncan to Herndon, [late 1866-early 1867], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 540.

³⁸⁷ Autobiography written for John Locke Scripps, [ca. June 1860], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:65.

³⁸⁸ Pratt, Finances of Lincoln, 15. For a biographical sketch of Trent, who served in Lincoln's company during the Black Hawk War, see McKenzie, "A Demographic Study of Select New Salem Precinct Residents," 106-9.

³⁸⁹ Thomas, "Lincoln the Postmaster," 3-9.

the postmaster. When the letter from Lincoln and the accompanying receipt reached him, Spears “immediately rode to Salem where he explained to Lincoln that it was the honesty of the messenger, and not the postmaster” that he suspected.³⁹¹

Another postal patron, one Johnson Elmore, irritated Lincoln. Elmore was “an ignorant, but ostentatious – proud man” who “used to go to Lincolns P.O. Every d[a]y – sometimes 3 or 4 times a day – if in town, and Enquire – ‘Anything for me.’” Exasperated but also amused, Lincoln “fixed a plan – wrote a letter to Johnson as coming from a negress in K[entuck]y – saying many good things about opossum, – dances – Corn shuckings – &c. and Ending – ‘Johns – Come & see me and old master won’t Kick you out of the Kitchen any more.’ Elmore took it out – opened it – couldn’t read a word – pretended to read it – went & got some friends to read it – read it correctly – thought the reader was fooling him – went to others – with the same result – At last Johnson said he would get Lincoln to read it – presented it to L: it was almost too much for him – read it. The man never asked afterwards – Any thing here for me.”³⁹²

When business took him out of the village, Lincoln delivered letters to homes, using his hat as a mailbag.³⁹³ To a farmer living west of New Salem who received three letters one day, Lincoln said: “so many letters having come for you and supposing they were of importance I brought them out to you.”³⁹⁴ For many years he continued to store letters in his

³⁹⁰ Lincoln to George C. Spears, [1 July 1834], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:25.

³⁹¹ J. Colby Beekman to Guy Richardson, Petersburg, Illinois, 31 January 1923, Albert J. Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress. The fellow whom Spears dispatched with the money to pay Lincoln was evidently fond of liquor. Bernice Babcock, “Postmaster Abe Lincoln,” undated clipping, Emanuel Hertz Scrapbooks, Library of Congress.

³⁹² James Miles, interview with Herndon, [1865-6], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 473. Miles heard this story from Samuel Hill.

³⁹³ Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 86.

³⁹⁴ Jonathan Colby, interviewed by Jesse W. Weik, n.d., in Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 333.

hat, not an unusual practice on the frontier. The historian William E. Connelley remembered that “all the lawyers I ever knew in Eastern Kentucky carried legal papers in their hats. I have seen them take off their hat, look through it for some particular paper, and when they were through the paper was put back with the other papers in the hat.”³⁹⁵

Lincoln kept his accounts carefully. After the New Salem post office closed in 1836, he had a surplus of about sixteen dollars, which he took with him when he moved to Springfield the following year. A few months later, when an agent approached Lincoln’s friend Anson G. Henry about the outstanding balance, Henry feared that the cash-strapped young man might not have it on hand. When Henry offered to help Lincoln, the former postmaster offered his thanks but “said he did not need assistance; went to his room and returned in a few minutes with a package in his hand, containing money, and on counting it out, it was found to be the exact amount called for by the draft, and the very money received by him.”³⁹⁶ Lincoln told the post office department agent, “I never make use of money that does not belong to me.”³⁹⁷

³⁹⁵ Connelley to Albert J. Beveridge, Topeka, Kansas, 21 January 1925, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁹⁶ [Anson G.] H[enry] to the editor of the Portland Oregonian, Lafayette, Oregon, 16 July 1860, copied in an unidentified newspaper clipping, Nicolay-Hay Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Henry gave a slightly different account to Isaac N. Arnold: “I was about to call him aside and loan him the money, when he asked the agent to be seated a moment, while he went over to his trunk at his boarding-house, and returned with an old blue sock with a quantity of silver and copper coin tied up in it. Untying the sock, he poured the contents on the table and proceeded to count the coin, which consisted of such silver and copper pieces as the country-people were then in the habit of using in paying postage. On counting it up there was found the exact amount, to a cent, of the draft, and in the identical coin which had been received. He never used, under any circumstances, trust funds.” Isaac N. Arnold, The Life of Abraham Lincoln (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1884), 39. See also Michael Burlingame, ed., Lincoln Observed: Civil War Dispatches of Noah Brooks (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 209, and a lecture on Lincoln by Frederick T. Dubois, 12 February 1906, p. 9, Dubois Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

³⁹⁷ Bernice Babcock, “Postmaster Abe Lincoln,” undated clipping, Emanuel Hertz Scrapbooks, Library of Congress.

Because his new part-time job paid little, Lincoln's fortunes reached such a low ebb by mid-1833 that he "was often . . . sorely pressed for five dollars to pay a board bill."³⁹⁸ His financial embarrassment led him at times to despair.³⁹⁹ He took several odd jobs: serving as an election clerk, splitting rails, tending both the mill and the saw mill, clerking in stores (among them Samuel Hill's), and harvesting crops for William Greene's mother, James Short, and others. Short praised him as "the best hand at husking corn on the stalk I ever saw. I used to consider myself very good, but he would gather two loads to my one." All this yielded just enough to make ends meet.⁴⁰⁰

Lincoln's financial situation improved dramatically when John Calhoun, the surveyor of Sangamon County, offered to hire him as an assistant. Calhoun, a leading Democrat, needed help in the northern part of the huge county, where New Salem was located. Business was heavy because the voyage of the Talisman prompted most landowners to have their property surveyed for town lots.⁴⁰¹ In the mid-1830s, new towns "were laid out in every direction . . . so rapidly that it was waggishly remarked by many people that the whole country was likely to be laid out into towns; and that no land would be left for farming purposes."⁴⁰² Writing from central Illinois in 1835, Stephen A. Douglas reported that the "rage for speculation in Lands runs high. Fortune after fortune is made as it were [by] magic,

³⁹⁸ [Anson G.] H[enry] to the editor of the Portland Oregonian, Lafayette, Oregon, 16 July 1860, copied in an unidentified newspaper clipping, Nicolay-Hay Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. A close student of Lincoln's finances concluded that he probably made about fifty to sixty dollars a year as postmaster. Lincoln received \$55.70 for a year's work in 1834-35 and \$19.48 for the first quarter of the next fiscal year. Pratt, Finances of Lincoln, 16-17.

³⁹⁹ Jason Duncan to Herndon, [late 1866-early 1867], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 540.

⁴⁰⁰ Reep, Lincoln at New Salem, 61; James Short to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 7 July 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 74; Carriel, Jonathan Baldwin Turner, 251, 255.

⁴⁰¹ Ross, Lincoln's First Years in Illinois, 26.

⁴⁰² Ford, History of Illinois, ed. Davis, 123.

by entering Lands at \$1.25 per acre and selling them again at advanced prices.”⁴⁰³ The so-called “townsite craze” lasted from roughly 1832 to 1838, during which time “Illinois town lots were hawked by smooth-tongued salesmen in the east and became one of the chief exports of the state. Surveyors were in demand and their stakes whitened the unbroken prairies where wolves howled and deer roamed.”⁴⁰⁴ In 1826, a visitor from the East reported that whenever he greeted a farmer, “before he returned your civilities, he draws from his breeches pocket a lithographic city, and asks you to take a few building lots, at half their value, and earnestly presses you to buy as a personal favor conferred on you.”⁴⁰⁵

Calhoun had known Lincoln in the Black Hawk War, when they served in the same regiment. Calhoun’s principal assistant, Thomas M. Neale, had also been a member of that unit.⁴⁰⁶ As comrades in arms, they had evidently become friends, and Neale may have recommended Lincoln to Calhoun.⁴⁰⁷ (In 1835, Neale was elected to replace Calhoun – who was running for state senator – as principal surveyor of the county and retained Lincoln as an assistant. Though a Whig, Lincoln voted for both men, who were Democrats.) Also endorsing Lincoln’s candidacy was Pollard Simmons, a Democrat from New Salem who “loved Lincoln” and whom Lincoln called “about the best friend I ever had.”⁴⁰⁸ When

⁴⁰³ Stephen A. Douglas to Gehazi Granger, Jacksonville, 9 November 1835, Johannsen, ed., Letters of Douglas, 23. See also Douglas to Julius N. Granger, Jacksonville, 21 May 1835, ibid., 18.

⁴⁰⁴ Lawrence B. Stringer, “The Townsite Craze,” ch. 9 of an unpublished biography of Lincoln, written ca. 1927, pp. 60-67, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁴⁰⁵ Davis, Frontier Illinois, 210-11.

⁴⁰⁶ Calhoun and Neale were privates in Captain Levi Gooden’s company of the fourth regiment of General Whiteside’s brigade; Lincoln was captain of a company in the same regiment. Born in Virginia in 1796, Neale moved to Kentucky, where he pursued legal studies. In 1824, he migrated to Illinois. The following year he surveyed the town of Springfield. Thrice elected surveyor of Sangamon County, he held that post until his death in 1840. William E. Barton, The Life of Abraham Lincoln (2 vols.; Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1925), 1:188n.

⁴⁰⁷ Lawrence B. Stringer, unpublished biography of Lincoln, written ca. 1927, pp. 60-63, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁴⁰⁸ Reep, Lincoln at New Salem, 62; reminiscences of George B. Lincoln, The Caledonian (St. Johnsbury, Vermont), 23 October 1890. See also Sandoval, Illinois, correspondence by L. B. G. (George B. Lincoln), 9

Calhoun responded favorably, Simmons jubilantly informed Lincoln, who asked: “Do I have to give up any of my principles for this job? If I have to surrender any thought or principle to get it I wouldn’t touch it with a ten foot pole.”

“No, you do not Lincoln,” said Simmons.

Lincoln replied, “[’]ll accept the office and now I thank you and my superior for it.”⁴⁰⁹

Lincoln was in fact eager to get that post, for there was much surveying work near New Salem and the pay was good.⁴¹⁰ After he called on Calhoun to accept the job formally, the chief surveyor’s sister-in-law disparaged the new assistant’s appearance; Calhoun replied, “[f]or all that he is no common man.”⁴¹¹ Lincoln “never forgot or ceased to be grateful for this kindness” of Calhoun’s and “spoke of Calhoun in terms of the highest esteem, and with affection.”⁴¹² William H. Herndon believed that Calhoun “loved Lincoln and as well as Lincoln could[,] he returned it.”⁴¹³ Years later, Calhoun, a “brave, intellectual, self-possessed, and cultivated” native of New England, would respectfully clash with Lincoln in political debates.⁴¹⁴ A fellow Democrat lauded him as “well informed and eminently talented – possessing a sound discriminating mind, and accurate judgement – distinguished for

January 1860, Chicago Press and Tribune, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 17 January 1860, and Lincoln Lore no. 1165 (6 August 1951).

⁴⁰⁹ John Moore Fisk, interview with Herndon, 18 February 1887, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 715.

⁴¹⁰ Ross, Lincoln’s First Years in Illinois, 7; Pratt, Finances of Lincoln, 18.

⁴¹¹ Reep, Lincoln at New Salem, 62.

⁴¹² John Locke Scripps, Life of Abraham Lincoln, ed. Roy P. Basler and Lloyd A. Dunlap (1860; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961), 66; Daniel W. Wilder, report of a conversation with Lincoln held in 1859, 4 July 1884, Kansas Historical Society Papers, quoted in Carol Dark Ayers, Lincoln and Kansas: Partnership for Freedom (Manhattan, Kansas: Sunflower University Press, 2001), 78.

⁴¹³ Herndon to Ward Hill Lamon, Springfield, 6 March 1870, Lamon Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

⁴¹⁴ Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 83.

cordiality, frankness and urbanity.”⁴¹⁵ Lincoln’s friend Robert L. Wilson thought Calhoun “a man of first class ability but too indolent to be a leader, hence he occupied a Subordinate position in his party.”⁴¹⁶ Herndon, who studied under Calhoun at a Springfield school, described him as “polite” and “affable,” praised him as “the most popular” of all the instructors as well as a “gentleman in every sense of the word.” Herndon lamented that “whisky ruined him.”⁴¹⁷ (In 1852, a Whig leader observed that Calhoun’s “known proclivity to spiritual indulgence” alienated voters.)⁴¹⁸ David Davis thought Calhoun “a social, companionable man, wholly destitute of moral principle, & reckless in pecuniary matters – of talents of a high order . . . always in office by appointment & never in office by the vote of the people.”⁴¹⁹

Lincoln began preparing for his new duties with characteristic industriousness; in an autobiographical sketch, he said that after accepting the offer, he “procured a compass and chain, studied Flint, and Gibson a little, and went at it. This procured bread, and kept body and soul together.”⁴²⁰ It is not certain how much time he spent learning the art of surveying, but it was surely more than six weeks, as some have improbably asserted.⁴²¹ He had studied the surveyor’s art ever since mastering grammar. Once the latter task was accomplished, he

⁴¹⁵ “Nailor” in the Illinois State Register (Springfield), 2 August 1844.

⁴¹⁶ Wilson to Herndon, Sterling, Illinois, 10 February 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 202.

⁴¹⁷ Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 84; Herndon to Ward Hill Lamon, Springfield, 6 March 1870, Lamon Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

⁴¹⁸ John A. Chesnut to Richard Yates, Carlinville, Illinois, 18 September 1852, Yates Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁴¹⁹ David Davis to Julius Rockwell, Bloomington, Illinois, 18 February 1858, Rockwell Papers, Lenox Public Library, Lenox, Massachusetts.

⁴²⁰ Autobiography written for John Locke Scripps, [ca. June 1860], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:65. The books referred to are Robert Gibson, Treatise on Practical Surveying and Abel Flint, System of Geometry and Trigonometry: Together with a Treatise on Surveying.

⁴²¹ Reep, Lincoln at New Salem, 62; Onstot, Pioneers of Menard and Mason Counties, 25.

told William Greene, “if that is what they call a science I’ll subdue another.”⁴²² He may have had some tutoring from Calhoun, Neale, or Greene, but James Short believed that Lincoln “never had any instructor in surveying.”⁴²³ Mentor Graham claimed that he taught Lincoln that skill, but that seems highly unlikely, for Graham knew little math.⁴²⁴ (The surveying books that Lincoln used as texts contained much math, especially Robert Gibson’s Treatise on Practical Surveying, whose opening chapters dealt with decimal fractions, logarithms, plane geometry, and trigonometry. Abel Flint’s System of Geometry and Trigonometry: Together with a Treatise on Surveying also devoted considerable attention to higher math.)⁴²⁵

Graham, in fact, hardly deserves to be called “the man who taught Lincoln.”⁴²⁶ His letters to William H. Herndon are marred by misspellings, faulty grammar, and eccentric capitalization. The son of Samuel Hill called Graham an “incessant talker” and “the dread of all who did not want time destroyed.” Villagers “would walk across the street to avoid meeting him.” When acting as School Commissioner of Menard County during the 1860s,

⁴²² Greene’s interview with James Q. Howard, [ca. May 1860], Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. Elsewhere Greene claimed that Lincoln began to study both surveying and grammar while clerking for Offutt in 1832. William G. Greene to Herndon, Tallula, Illinois, 29 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 18. Henry McHenry recalled that “during the latter part of the year 1832 – or first part of 1833 he studied surveying and went at surveying practically during the same year.” Henry McHenry to Herndon (interview), Petersburg, Illinois, 29 May 1865, ibid., 14.

⁴²³ Short to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 7 July 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 74. Greene claimed that he helped teach Lincoln surveying. Ross, Lincoln’s First Years in Illinois, 6-7. According to Jesse W. Fell, Calhoun “taught him the art of surveying land.” Fell to David Davis, Normal, Illinois, 15 December 1885, Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 14 January 1886. It is possible that Calhoun’s assistant, Thomas M. Neale, helped Lincoln as he studied surveying. Lawrence B. Stringer’s unpublished biography of Lincoln, written ca. 1927, p. 65, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. According to his son, John Dunham Wright may also have helped Lincoln in his studies. Milton H. Shutes, Lincoln and California (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1943), 2n.

⁴²⁴ Mentor Graham to Herndon (interview), Petersburg, Illinois, 29 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 10; Elizabeth Herndon Bell (Graham’s daughter), interview with Herndon, [March 1887?], ibid., 606; Henry McHenry to Herndon (interview), Petersburg, Illinois, 29 May 1865, ibid., 14; Duncan and Nikols, Mentor Graham, 51, 154-55; B. F. Irwin to J. J. Porter, Pleasant Plains, Illinois, 12 July, Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 21 July 1895. Even Duncan and Nikols, Graham’s defensive biographers, acknowledged that “Figures were not easy for him.”

⁴²⁵ Adin Baber, A. Lincoln with Compass and Chain (Kansas, Illinois: privately printed, 1968), 2-4.

⁴²⁶ Duncan and Nikols, Mentor Graham: The Man who Taught Lincoln.

Hill “examined Mister Graham under the law, in order to give him certificate to teach (without which he could not) and had to refuse to give him certificate of qualification, except 4th grade which was for a special school under local permit and branches below fractions in arithmetic.” Graham was, according to Hill, “a small country teacher, with a temper which run like an alarm clock. I would have crossed the street any time to avoid meeting him and my father would have walked around a block. His education, in my examination of him, turned out to be most limited and his claims . . . as having educated Mr. Lincoln were not born out by their ability to do so.”⁴²⁷ Graham’s defensive biographers acknowledged that some of his pupils remembered him as “a whipping, domineering” teacher.⁴²⁸ One of those pupils, A. W. Hartley recalled “that Graham was high strung in temperament, erratic, volatile, and voluble; that his pupils were fearful of his outbursts of temper; that he taught only lower grade work; that he did not exhibit any unusual knowledge or ability as an educator; and that he was about the average rural country school teacher of pioneer days, and was avoided by busy men on the streets of Petersburg on account of his loquacity which amounted to boredom.” Hartley “had never observed in Graham any quality that would lead a man of Lincoln’s type to seek his counsel or instruction.”⁴²⁹ Another pupil, William Godbey, when asked to be a pall bearer at Graham’s re-interment, declined, saying: “I did not like Mentor Graham when I went to school to him and I don’t like him yet.”⁴³⁰

⁴²⁷ John Hill to Ida Tarbell, Columbus, Georgia, 6 and 17 February 1896, Ida M. Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

⁴²⁸ Duncan and Nikols, Mentor Graham, 97. See also William G. Greene to Herndon, 7 June 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 26.

⁴²⁹ Henry E. Pond to Martin L. Houser, n.p., n.d., in M. L. Houser, Lincoln’s Education and Other Essays (New York: Bookman, 1957), 108-9.

⁴³⁰ William Godbey told this to John Clark Harris. Harris, “Following in the Footsteps of Abraham Lincoln,” typescript, p. 117, Lincoln Long Nine Museum, Athens, Illinois. I am grateful to John Eden, head of the museum, for lending me this volume.

Having mastered the basics of surveying, Lincoln set out with his compass, 66-foot chain, marking pins, range poles, plumb bobs, stakes, and ax to pursue his new calling.⁴³¹ When a friend told him he needed a horse, Lincoln demurred, saying he “was somewhat of a ‘hoss’ himself.”⁴³² At first, he borrowed a steed from Jack Armstrong; eventually he bought one, along with a bridle and saddle, on credit.⁴³³ Lincoln did not record his first survey until January 6, 1834.⁴³⁴ His friends and neighbors helped him celebrate his good fortune. When “he got a job there was a picknick and jolly time in the neighborhood. Men and boys would gather around ready to carry chains, drive stakes and blaze trees – but mainly to hear Lincoln’s odd stories and funny jokes – interspersed with foot races and wrestling matches in which Lincoln was always the victor, when persuaded to take a hand.”⁴³⁵ While surveying, he made many friends among the voters of the county, including Charles Chandler, a Connecticut-born physician who in 1832 had settled on Panther Creek, where he entered a plot. He wished to buy eighty adjacent acres, but another pioneer from the Nutmeg State, the newly-arrived Henry Laurens Ingalls, cast a covetous eye on the same tract, though frontier custom dictated that a settler had first refusal rights on land parcels adjoining his original claim. Fearful that the newcomer would buy the property he wanted, Chandler quickly borrowed some cash and headed for the Springfield land office, which was also Ingalls’ destination. As Chandler rode along, he explained the story to some horsemen whom he had overtaken. One of them was Lincoln, who offered to swap his fresh mount for Chandler’s

⁴³¹ Baber, Lincoln with Compass and Chain, 11-15.

⁴³² Henry McHenry, interview with Herndon, [1866], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informant, 534.

⁴³³ Pratt, Finances of Lincoln, 13; reminiscences of Hannah Armstrong, Havana correspondence, 14 December 1865, Chicago Republican, n.d., copied in the Belleville Advocate, 5 January 1866.

⁴³⁴ Fern Nance Pond, “Two Early Lincoln Surveys,” Abraham Lincoln Quarterly 6 (1950): 121-25; Baber, Lincoln with Compass and Chain, 39-46. Lincoln may have done some work in 1833, but the documentation is not definitive. Ibid., 7.

⁴³⁵ James M. Ruggles, “Lincoln as a Surveyor,” Ida M. Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

tired one. Grateful for the generous offer, Chandler declined, knowing he would probably beat Ingalls to Springfield. As Chandler later said, “I became a Lincoln man then,” and when he needed to have his new tract surveyed, he hired the young man from New Salem.⁴³⁶

Many others employed him, for he had quickly gained an enviable reputation as a surveyor. As Robert L. Wilson explained, “the Settlers made it a point to Secure choice lots of timber land, to go with their pra[i]rie land, often not entering the pra[i]rie part of the farm until it had been under cultivation long enough to make the money of the land to enter it. But the timber lots had to be Surveyed for the purpose of entering them, but also to protect from trespass by cutting. To accomplish this, lines must be run and clearly marked. Mr Lincoln had the monop[o]ly of finding the lines, and when any dispute arose among the Settlers, Mr Lincoln[’]s Compass and chain always settled the matter satisfactorily.”⁴³⁷ When Henry McHenry and his neighbors had a “disputed Corner,” they “agreed to send for Lincoln & to abide by his decision as surveyor & judge.” Lincoln accepted the commission and “came down with Compass – flag staff – Chain &c and stopped . . . 3 or 4 days and surveyed the whole section.” When they found the disputed corner on the survey, “Lincoln then stuck down his staff and said – ‘Gentlemen – here is the Corner.’” The contesting parties dug and soon discovered “about 6 or 8 inches of the original stake, sharpened & cut with an axe and

⁴³⁶ Coleman Smoot to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 7 May 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 254; Chandler, interview with Herndon, [1885-89], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 719-21; undated letter by Chandler’s daughter, Mrs. S. L. B. Chandler, in Josephine Craven Chandler, “New Salem: Early Chapter in Lincoln’s Life,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 22 (1930): 546-48; Mary F. Colby Dixon, “The Coming of the Ingalls Family to Illinois,” ibid., 18 (1925): 416-21. Different versions of the story can be found in Ephraim Ingalls to Jesse W. Weik, Chicago, 28 February 1894, in Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 358, and in the Virginia, Illinois, Inquirer, 13 September 1906, copy, Ida M. Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College. The latter is based in part on an account by Charles C. Frackelton of Petersburg.

⁴³⁷ Robert L. Wilson to Herndon, Sterling, Illinois, 10 February 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 201.

at the bottom a piece of charcoal” that had been placed there by the first surveyor. All the disputants were entirely satisfied.⁴³⁸

Between 1834 and 1836, Lincoln surveyed homesites, roads, school sections, and towns, including New Boston, Petersburg, Huron, and Bath.⁴³⁹ While platting Petersburg, Lincoln changed a line as an act of kindness to Jemima Elmore, widow of a member of the company he had commanded in the Black Hawk War.⁴⁴⁰ He calculated that if he ran a street straight through in the customary fashion, it would slice a few feet off of Mrs. Elmore’s house, which was all she owned, and she probably could never get another one. Lincoln said: “it won’t hurt anything out here if I skew the line a little.”⁴⁴¹ His work in laying out New Boston earned high praise from Peter Van Bergen, who had invested money to develop the site. “Mr. Lincoln was a good surveyor,” Van Bergen remarked; “he did it all himself, without help from anybody except chainmen &c. and also made a plat of it.”⁴⁴² The founders of Huron liked his work so much that they allegedly offered to provide him \$5,000 to establish a store there.⁴⁴³

Surveying was hard on crews. In 1817, the Surveyor-General Northwest of the Ohio paid tribute to practitioners of the art: “None but Men as hard as a Savage who is always at

⁴³⁸ Henry McHenry, interview with Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 29 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 14-15.

⁴³⁹ Baber, Lincoln with Compass and Chain, 37-139. During that period, Thomas M. Neal replaced Calhoun as county surveyor.

⁴⁴⁰ Lawrence B. Stringer’s unpublished biography of Lincoln, written ca. 1927, p. 65, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield; statement by Samuel L. Watkins in Fred L. Holmes, Abraham Lincoln Traveled This Way (Boston: L. C. Page, 1930), 57.

⁴⁴¹ A Mr. Maguire, quoted in the Chicago Times-Herald, 22 September 1895. This may have been John Maguire, whom Lincoln represented in an 1842 law suit. Maguire v. Coflin, LPAL case file # 03022.

⁴⁴² Van Bergen, interview with John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 7 July 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 33.

⁴⁴³ The founders were Ninian Edwards and William Jayne. William H. Herndon told this story to a newspaper correspondent. Cincinnati Commercial, 25 July 1867.

Home in Woods & Swamps can live upon what they afford (if occasions so require) who can travel for Days up to the knees in mud & mire, can drink any fluid he finds while he is drenched with water also – and has a knowledge of the lands who are equally patient & persevering under similar hardships can make anything by surveying the kind of Country we have to Survey.”⁴⁴⁴ Lincoln often wore an old, broken straw hat, no coat or vest, and pants that extended only to his boot tops.⁴⁴⁵ Elizabeth Abell, at whose home Lincoln stayed while he was surveying the hills between New Salem and Petersburg, recalled that he would often return at night “ragged and scratch[ed] up with the Bryers.” He “would laugh over it and say that was a poore man[’]s lot.” As Jack Armstrong, Jr., explained: “the cloth wouldn’t last no time out in the brush and grass and briars where surveyors had to tramp. So they used to sew a covering of buckskin on the outside of the legs. That was what we called foxing ’em.” Mrs. Abell and Hannah Armstrong both foxed Lincoln’s trousers.⁴⁴⁶ Mrs. Armstrong, at whose home Lincoln also stayed while on surveying expeditions, told a journalist: “I made two pairs of deer-skin breeches for him – shirts, too.” Her husband carried chain for Lincoln on some surveying jobs. “They were great cronies,” Mrs. Armstrong recalled. “Wherever Armstrong went Lincoln would go too.”⁴⁴⁷

In addition to platting towns and roads, Lincoln laid out a race track for the colorful Thomas Watkins, Sr., an eccentric horseman and money lender who had sold him a mount on

⁴⁴⁴ Edwin Tiffin to Josiah Meigs, 9 October 1817, quoted in Malcolm Rohrbough, The Land Office Business: The Settlement and Administration of American Public Lands, 1789-1837 (1968; Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1990), 82.

⁴⁴⁵ Recollections of Edmund Rankin, for whom Lincoln did some surveying, in Stephen A. Foley to William S. Burns, Lincoln, Illinois, 29 October 1874 [misfiled 29 February], Lincoln Collection, Brown University.

⁴⁴⁶ Elizabeth Abell to Herndon, 15 February 1867, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 557; Russell Godbey, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], ibid., 450; Jack Armstrong, quoted in Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 7; Reep, Lincoln at New Salem, 62.

⁴⁴⁷ Havana correspondence, 14 December 1865, Chicago Republican, n.d., copied in the Belleville Advocate, 5 January 1866.

credit.⁴⁴⁸ When Lincoln fell behind in his payments, Watkins, a tall, high-strung, litigious man, grew impatient and sued in April 1834.⁴⁴⁹ That same month other creditors, including Peter Van Bergen, also won judgments against Lincoln.⁴⁵⁰ At a sheriff's auction, Lincoln's surveying tools and horse were sold off.⁴⁵¹ James Short, a friend of Lincoln from Sandridge, saw that he was "very much discouraged" and heard him say "he would let the whole thing go by the board." The generous Short bought his possessions for \$120 and returned them to Lincoln, who in expressing his gratitude, said: "Uncle Jimmy, I will do as much for you sometimes."⁴⁵² (As president, Lincoln appointed Short to supervise an Indian agency.)⁴⁵³

ELECTION TO THE STATE LEGISLATURE

While surveying land in Sangamon County, Lincoln also surveyed his political prospects, which seemed encouraging. Democrats thought him an attractive candidate for reasons that William Butler listed: "the prominence given him by his captaincy in the Black

⁴⁴⁸ William G. Greene to Herndon (interview), Elm Wood, Illinois, 30 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 20; Henry McHenry, interview with Herndon, [1866], ibid., 534.

⁴⁴⁹ John Hill to Ida M. Tarbell, Columbus, Georgia, 17 February 1896, Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College; Thomas P. Reep to William H. Townsend, Petersburg, Illinois, 20 July 1923, Townsend Papers, University of Kentucky, Lexington; testimony of Watkins' son, Thomas Watkins, Jr., in Tarbell, Early Life of Lincoln, 186. See also Onstot, Pioneers of Menard and Mason Counties, 142-43, and Reep, Lincoln at New Salem, 122-24.

⁴⁵⁰ Court order of 24 November 1834, in the case of Peter Van Bergen vs. William F. Berry, Abraham Lincoln, and William G. Green, New Salem Legal Collection, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne; Pratt, Personal Finances of Lincoln, 12-13.

⁴⁵¹ On 21 February 1835, these items were auctioned off. Also in the judgment were the undivided half of lots 16 and 17 north of Main Street, owned by Lincoln, but the sale of those lots was stayed by order of the plaintiff on 7 March 1835. Annotation on court order of 24 November 1834, in the case of Peter Van Bergen vs. William F. Berry, Abraham Lincoln, and William G. Green, New Salem Legal Collection, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

⁴⁵² James Short to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 7 July 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 74; Reep, Lincoln at New Salem, 65.

⁴⁵³ Short was named supervisor of the Round Valley, California, reservation. Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:326n. Well before that time, Lincoln had paid him back the \$120. Short to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 7 July 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 74.

Hawk War – because he was a good fellow – because he told good stories, and remembered good jokes – because he was genial, kind, sympathetic, open-hearted – because when he was asked a question and gave an answer it was always characteristic, brief, pointed, apropos, out of the common way and manner, and yet exactly suited to the time place and thing.”⁴⁵⁴

Democrats courted his favor with patronage plums like the postmastership and the deputy surveyor’s job. They had reason to hope Lincoln would join them; during the 1830s it was common in Illinois for ambitious politicians to affiliate with the Democratic party.⁴⁵⁵ New Salem Democrats told their party comrades elsewhere in Sangamon County to assist Lincoln or else they would not back other Democratic office seekers.⁴⁵⁶ One of the leading Democrats in New Salem, justice of the peace Bowling Green, persuaded Lincoln to run a second time for the legislature.⁴⁵⁷ In March, Green and Lincoln had presided over a political meeting called to endorse a candidate for governor.⁴⁵⁸ Green and other Democrats approached Lincoln, offering to remove two of their own nominees in favor of his candidacy, a ploy that might jeopardize the chances of Lincoln’s friend, John Todd Stuart. Lincoln promptly informed Stuart, who recalled that he “told me that the Jackson men had been to him and proposed to him that they would drop two of their men and take him up and vote for him for the purpose of beating me. Lincoln acted fairly and honorably about it by coming and submitting the proposition to me. From my experience in the former race in 1832 I had great

⁴⁵⁴ William Butler, interview with John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 13 June 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 20.

⁴⁵⁵ Stuart, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 480. Stuart cited Thomas Ford and George Forquer as examples.

⁴⁵⁶ S. T. Logan, interview with John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 6 July 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 36.

⁴⁵⁷ Enclosure by Abner Y. Ellis in Ellis to Herndon, Moro, Illinois, 23 January 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 171.

⁴⁵⁸ Basler ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:21-22.

confidence in my strength – perhaps too much as I was a young man – but I told L. to go and tell them he would take their votes – that I would risk it.”⁴⁵⁹

An important issue in 1834 was a proposal to lop off the New Salem area from Sangamon County (at that time over twice the size of Rhode Island), and form a new county.⁴⁶⁰ Slow and primitive transportation compelled those living far from Springfield to waste much time traveling to and from that county seat. In 1832, a contributor to the Illinois Magazine described some of the difficulties encountered by travelers: “In the spring, the bottom-lands on the margin of our rivers are over-flowed, the channels of all streams are full, and the travelling in any direction is impeded, and sometimes wholly stopped, by high waters.” Along the virtually impassable roads a rider found himself “wading through ponds and quagmires, enjoying the delights of log bridges and wooden causeways, and vainly invoking the name of McAdam, as he plunges deeper and deeper into mire and misfortune.”⁴⁶¹ Another traveler depicted a primitive route he took in central Illinois during the summer of 1838: “Our road through the timber was exceedingly rough and tiresome. Road it ought not to be called, track is a fitter name. Not a tree had been fallen, and every one went hither and thither among the trees, in search of a better path, as his judgment dictated or his horse inclined. Large and deep holes, still filled with water, whose surface was thickly coated with green slime, continually obstructed our way. Into these were we occasionally obliged to plunge.”⁴⁶²

⁴⁵⁹ John Todd Stuart, interview with John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 23 June 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 11. Stuart added that “I believe he did so. I and my friends knowing their tactics, then concentrated our fight against one of their men – it was [Richard] Quinton – and in this way we beat Quinton and elected Lincoln and myself.” See also Stuart’s interview with James Q. Howard, [May 1860], copy in John G. Nicolay’s hand, John Hay Papers, Brown University.

⁴⁶⁰ See John Allen’s account of the movement for dividing the county, Sangamo Journal, 14 July 1838.

⁴⁶¹ “Hints to Emigrants,” Illinois Monthly Magazine, quoted in the Sangamo Journal, 9 February 1832.

⁴⁶² Abner D. Jones, Illinois and the West (Boston: Weeks, Jordan, 1838), 171.

The need to travel many miles under such conditions worked a hardship on jurors, witnesses, litigants, traders, and others, especially for residents of New Salem, who objected to the “inconveniences they have so often experienced in leaving their homes, and going so far as Springfield [twenty miles] to do all their public business; and to attend ten or twelve days at a time upon the courts without hearing from their families.”⁴⁶³ In 1830, residents of the northwest corner of Sangamon County gathered in New Salem and petitioned to have a new county created.⁴⁶⁴ In the winter of 1832-33, Hugh Armstrong and Ned Potter obtained 195 signatures on a petition to the legislature calling for the creation of a new county. (Among the signers were Lincoln’s friends William F. Berry, Jack Kelso, James Pantier, Charles Maltby, James Rutledge, and Mentor Graham.)⁴⁶⁵ They also persuaded Lincoln to pledge that he would attempt to get New Salem detached and incorporated into a new county.⁴⁶⁶ In 1860, a Democratic newspaper in Petersburg (the successor town to New Salem) claimed that “Lincoln declared himself uncompromisingly in favor of the proposition” to divide Sangamon County.⁴⁶⁷ That promise won many Democratic supporters in New Salem. Sam Hill, a fiercely partisan Democrat, stated “that he and many others both whig and democrat got Mr. Lincoln nominated and elected on the county dividing question – there being a near unanimous vote for him about New Salem while he carried the whig vote

⁴⁶³ John Allen, in the Sangamo Journal, 14 July 1838.

⁴⁶⁴ For an overview of the process of county creation, see Davis, Frontier Illinois, 320-28.

⁴⁶⁵ Harry E. Pratt, “Lincoln and the Division of Sangamon County,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 47 (1954): 398-99. Hugh Armstrong (1800-39) of Clary’s Grove, half-brother of Bowling Green, was quite active in New Salem political life. His brother-in-law, Edward (Ned) Potter, bought half of the 80-acre parcel Armstrong had purchased in 1826. McKenzie, “A Demographic Study of Select New Salem Precinct Residents,” 37-39.

⁴⁶⁶ John Potter told this story to Walter B. Stevens in 1886. Washington correspondence by Walter B. Stevens, 17 December, St. Louis Globe-Democrat, 20 December 1888.

⁴⁶⁷ Petersburg, Illinois, Semi-Weekly Axis, 7 July 1860.

in the balance of the county.”⁴⁶⁸ In addition, commercial ties and waterways connected New Salem with Beardstown on the Illinois River, not with Springfield.⁴⁶⁹

In 1834, Lincoln was especially popular in New Salem for favoring construction of a canal from Beardstown to the Sangamon River.⁴⁷⁰ That canal would prevent flooding in the spring and eliminate the stagnant pools left by the receding floodwaters, which created health problems.⁴⁷¹ It would also allow farmers to transport their produce more cheaply to the Illinois River, forty miles away. That river was their preferred highway to the world market, for the Sangamon was unnavigable except in the spring. Many New Salemites lived in the valley of Salt Creek, geographically distinct from the Sangamon River valley.⁴⁷² Residents of New Salem hoped that if a new county were created, their town would become the county seat.⁴⁷³

Other than the county division question, Lincoln avoided issues in the 1834 canvass, which he later described as “more of a hand-shaking campaign than anything else.”⁴⁷⁴ He

⁴⁶⁸ John Hill to Ida M. Tarbell, Columbus, Georgia, 6 and 17 February 1896, Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College. In 1862, Hill wrote a similar account: “A division of the county was anxiously desired by both political parties about New Salem; but was bitterly opposed by the people of another portion of the county. It was to be tested in the legislature the next winter. Those who wished for the division of the county, in looking around, could find no one more suitable for a representative of their interests than this youth. – He was nominated as their candidate, and elected without regard to party politics.” Petersburg, Illinois, Menard Axis, 15 February 1862, in Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 25.

⁴⁶⁹ Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 14.

⁴⁷⁰ Herndon to Ward Hill Lamon, Springfield, 25 February 1870, Lamon Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California, 64; Herndon interviewed in Volney Hickox, “Lincoln at Home,” Illinois State Journal, 15 October 1874.

⁴⁷¹ Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 76. In this biography, Herndon asserted that Lincoln proposed this scheme during the 1832 rather than the 1834 campaign.

⁴⁷² Lawrence B. Stringer noted that “the valleys of the Salt and the Sangamon in the Lincoln days were distinct and separate. Thirty miles over bridgeless streams, roadless prairies and miring marshes constituted a day’s journey. Visitation between the two valleys was infrequent and the inhabitants of each valley lived largely unto themselves.” Stringer, “Abraham Lincoln,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 24 (1932): 683. Salt Creek, which flows along the northeast corner of old Sangamon County, empties into the Sangamon.

⁴⁷³ Stringer, “Abraham Lincoln,” 684.

⁴⁷⁴ Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 87.

published no declaration like the one he had issued two years earlier.⁴⁷⁵ In Springfield, his friend Abner Y. Ellis put him up and introduced him to leading Whigs. When Lincoln stumped Island Grove, Ellis recalled, he delivered a speech “which pleased his party friends Very Well indeed – though some of the Jackson Men tried to Make sport of him, He told several anecdotes in his Speech and applied them as I thought Verry Well.” He also amused his audience with some off-color stories. The speech, Ellis added, was “verry – clear & Logical,” although in delivering it, Lincoln “was Not verry self possessed” and seemed “timid.”⁴⁷⁶ At Island Grove, Lincoln encountered thirty men harvesting crops. When approached by the candidate, they declared that they would support no man unless he could lend them a hand. Lincoln replied, “well, boys if that is all I am sure of your votes.” He grabbed a cradle and easily pitched in. The workers were so pleased that they all voted for him. When Dr. Richard F. Barrett learned that the fellow wielding the cradle was a Whig candidate for the legislature, he scornfully asked J. Rowan Herndon if the party could not find any better nominee than that. Herndon urged the doctor to attend a political rally where all the candidates would speak the next day. Barrett followed this advice and later told Herndon that Lincoln knew “more than all of them Put together.”⁴⁷⁷

In addition to knowledge, Lincoln had a quality that, according to Governor Thomas Ford, “most recommended a man to his friends” as a vote-seeker, namely “that of being merry, and of laughing agreeably.”⁴⁷⁸ He also had a knack for ingratiating himself to voters

⁴⁷⁵ Lincoln may have been so strapped for cash he could not afford the modest one dollar fee that the paper charged for announcements of candidacy. Andy Van Meter, Always My Friend: A History of the State Journal-Register and Springfield (Springfield: Copley Press, 1981), 34.

⁴⁷⁶ Ellis, statement for Herndon, enclosed in Ellis to Herndon, Moro, Illinois, 23 January 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 171; Ellis to Herndon, Moro, Illinois, 30 January 1866, ibid., 179.

⁴⁷⁷ J. Rowan Herndon to William H. Herndon, Quincy, Illinois, 28 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 8. In 1840, Lincoln had a similar experience when challenged to hurl a large cannon ball. Andrew S. Kirk interviewed by Herndon, Petersburg, 3 March 1887, ibid., 602-3.

⁴⁷⁸ Ford, History of Illinois, ed. Davis, 197.

through other means. Describing the 1834 campaign, Charles Maltby explained that “in those early days in Illinois it was customary for candidates for public favor . . . to call at the homes and dwellings of their constituents.” Lincoln showed himself “peculiarly gifted” at such campaigning. “Under all circumstances he made himself pleasant and agreeable with all persons, with the rich or poor, in the stately mansion or log cabin.” When dealing with the lowly, “he was respectful, deferential and sociable.” With the prosperous, “he was affable, agreeable, simple.” He “felt at home” in “the family circle, around the fireside, no matter how humble.” He would converse “with the father and other relatives” about “their hopes and prospects in life, the schools, farm, crops, stock. These, and farm and family topics, were so pleasantly canvassed that they were made to feel that they had met a friend – one near as a brother.” Then Lincoln would turn his attention to the youngsters, “and on his knee or around his person they would be listening to his stories, while the mother would hear with pleasure that they were fine, beautiful children; that Willie was the image of his father, and Sarah, the most beautiful one, looked like her mother, and that she reminded him of a dear sister, a playmate of his youthful days.” He would give the children candy and nuts. According to Maltby, those “tender and simple interviews of Lincoln with the families he met, came from the natural impulses of his heart, to create kind feelings and thoughts in others, and receive corresponding pleasure in life.” Such campaigning “was Lincoln’s forte – his great success in securing the respect, confidence and support of his fellow citizens at the polls.” Other candidates were puzzled, Maltby noted: “They could not understand how he, homely and unpretending, could so universally secure the respect and esteem of the women and children.” Often Lincoln and an opponent “would meet and spend the night at the same farm house.” They both “were greeted with the hospitality then so proverbial in the Western States.” While dinner was cooking, “instead of repairing to the house to discuss the politics

of the day,” Lincoln proposed a tour of the farm. The lanky politico would inspect and praise the livestock and crops. After dinner, the menfolk would retire to the veranda to discuss current issues. When the wife and children joined them, Lincoln would call over one of the youngsters and tell some stories of his youth. If the child were a boy, Lincoln would describe how “with his dogs, he used to hunt the raccoons and wild cats, and set his traps for the wild turkeys; if a girl, he related how, with this sister, he often went with her to gather in the woods, the wild berries and flowers; and then, turning to the mother, he would relate the trials and hardships of a frontier life in Indiana, and speak of the love and affection of a dear, departed mother, and his fond recollections of her blessed memory.” Such folksy campaigning won Lincoln “the respect and esteem of all classes of men and women” and “was the secret of his popularity and success.”⁴⁷⁹

Lincoln’s fondness for children and his kindness in general were no mere campaign affectations. J. Rowan Herndon recalled that Lincoln “was very fond of Childern.” While boarding at Herndon’s just after the Black Hawk War, Lincoln, said Herndon, “most always had one of my Childern around with him.” During his stay, Herndon added, “my family Became much atatched to him[.] he was always at home wherever he went.”⁴⁸⁰ One of John Camron’s many daughters testified that Lincoln was “full to the chin with fun and always playing droll pranks on us girls.” A favorite “was to pluck his friends by their ears – he was always doing that.” The Camron girls often scolded Lincoln for such horseplay. He assigned the Camron children nicknames: Vienna he called “Quinine,” Tom he renamed “Tam o’ Shanter,” Betsy he referred to as “Queen Isabella,” and Eliza he dubbed “John.”⁴⁸¹ According

⁴⁷⁹ Maltby, Lincoln, 44-45.

⁴⁸⁰ J. Rowan Herndon to Herndon, 28 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 7.

⁴⁸¹ Vienna Camron Lyster, daughter of John M. Camron, interviewed in the Los Angeles Times, 2 October 1904; undated statement by Martha C. Camron (Mrs. Noah McCuiston), in Drake, Flame o’ Dawn, 209.

to another of the Camron daughters, Lincoln “was always playing pranks and poking fun at the girls – a great, awkward, joking fellow.”⁴⁸² Nancy Rutledge remembered that all the children in New Salem “loved him and enjoyed his quaint jokes and pranks as thoroughly as he himself seemed to.”⁴⁸³

Voters in the hamlet of Athens favored Lincoln because he had saved one of their neighbors from a dangerous ordeal. A fierce rivalry had grown up between Athens and New Salem, fueled by raids upon one community by residents of the other; in turn, retaliatory counter-raids were executed. On such expeditions, the attacking party usually prevailed. One day, when a raider from Athens incautiously visited New Salem with no companions, several New Salemites stuffed him into a sugar hogshead, nailed it shut, and prepared to roll him down the steep 200-foot bluff into the river. Lincoln persuaded his townsmen to abandon that potentially fatal plan, a gesture which made him “the idol of the Athens boys – they worshipped him” and supported him enthusiastically in his races for the legislature.⁴⁸⁴

A potential threat to Lincoln’s electoral chances was his reputation as a religious skeptic. Isaac Snodgrass of New Salem urged neighbors to vote against him because of his alleged deism.⁴⁸⁵ At that time, Lincoln knew many religious skeptics.⁴⁸⁶ After discussing with his New Salem friends such iconoclastic works as Constantine de Volney’s The Ruins; or, A Survey of the Revolutions of Empires and Thomas Paine’s Age of Reason and

⁴⁸² Undated statement by Martha C. Camron (Mrs. Noah McCuiston), in Drake, Flame o’ Dawn, 209.

⁴⁸³ Interview with Nancy Rutledge Prewitt, conducted by Margaret Flindt, Fairfield, Iowa, correspondence, 10 February, Chicago Inter-Ocean, 12 February 1899.

⁴⁸⁴ The Menard County Axis (Petersburg, Illinois), 5 January 1867. Lincoln reportedly saved an elderly drunk named Jimmy Jordan from a similar fate. Paul Hull, “Lincoln as a Wrestler,” New York Mail and Express, 11 January 1896, p. 11.

⁴⁸⁵ Russell Godbey, interview with Herndon, [1865-6], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 449. Snodgrass was not persuasive; his brother-in-law, a staunch Democrat, voted for Lincoln despite the charge of deism.

⁴⁸⁶ Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 266.

Common Sense, Lincoln wrote an essay in a similar vein.⁴⁸⁷ When he told Samuel Hill of his intention to publish it, Hill, fearing it might ruin Lincoln’s political career, snatched the manuscript and flung it into the fire.⁴⁸⁸ When Hill’s devout wife asked the skeptical Lincoln, “Do you really believe there isn’t any future state?” he replied: “Mrs. Hill, I’m afraid that when we die that is the last of us.”⁴⁸⁹

Jesse W. Fell believed that on “the innate depravity of man, the character and office of the great head of the church, the atonement, the infallibility of the written revelation, the performance of miracles, the nature and design of present and future rewards and punishments . . . and many other subjects,” Lincoln “held opinions utterly at variance with

⁴⁸⁷ Abner Y. Ellis, statement for Herndon, enclosed in Ellis to Herndon, Moro, Illinois, 23 January 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 172.

⁴⁸⁸ According to Hardin Bale, “[a]bout the year 1834 A Lincoln wrote a work on infidelity, denying the divinity of the Scriptures and was persuaded by his friends – particularly by Saml to burn it which was done.” Hardin Bale to Herndon (interview), Petersburg, Illinois, 29 May 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 13. John Hill told Herndon, “[a]s to Mr Lincoln’s book on Infidelity, I gave you all my knowledge verbally. Since my early childhood I remember to have heard it alluded to, hundreds of times by different old settlers. Of late years I have heard less of it, as these old men have many of them passed away. I have a better remembrance of it by my father’s connection with it. You know that there are always some few things that strike into the minds of a child at early age which time will never eradicate. This is one of the circumstances from which I date my earliest remembrance. It could not have been on account of Lincoln’s position, as that the time I knew no more as to who he was than I did of the inhabitants of the Fejee Islands. When I heard of my father having morally compelled Mr Lincoln to burn the book, on account of its infamy &c pointing to Voltaire, Paine &c, the circumstance struck me so forcibly that I have never heard the word infidelity, Paine or Voltaire, since, without thinking of it. My mother was strictly religious, and before hearing of this I had always thought my father to be averse to religion. I was so surprised that I suppose it made the deeper impression. As to date I do not know. It was in the winter time, as tradition says it was done in father[’]s store, while there was fire in the stove, & that there it was burned.” John Hill to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 27 June 1865, *ibid.*, 61-62; John Hill to Ida M. Tarbell, Columbus, Georgia, 6 and 17 February 1896, Ida Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College; Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 265-69. Mentor Graham denied this story, implausibly claiming that Lincoln wrote a defense of “universal salvation,” not an attack on Christianity, and that Hill impulsively grabbed and burned a letter about Ann Rutledge, not an essay on religion. Graham to Benjamin F. Irwin, Petersburg, Illinois, 17 March 1874, in Duncan and Nikols, Mentor Graham, 228-29. The best man at Lincoln’s wedding, James H. Matheny, alleged that Lincoln told him “that he did write a little Book on Infidelity.” Matheny, interview with Herndon, [by 2 March 1870], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 577. Herndon believed that Lincoln wrote the work on religion sometime in 1836, while recovering from the death of his sweetheart, Ann Rutledge. In Herndon’s view, that volume “was a burst of despair. . . . Lincoln wrote under the idea that God had cursed and crushed him especially.” Herndon to a Mr. Cronyer, Springfield, 3 December 1866, Emanuel Hertz, ed., The Hidden Lincoln: From the Letters & Papers of William H. Herndon (New York: Viking, 1938), 43.

⁴⁸⁹ Parthena Hill, interview with Walter B. Stevens, 1886, in Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 12. Mrs. Hill thought that “this unsettled view of religion underwent a change after Lincoln moved to Springfield.”

what are usually taught in the Churches.” His “expressed views on these and kindred topics were such as, in the estimation of most believers, would place him entirely outside the Christian pale.”⁴⁹⁰ One day during the Civil War, Lincoln told a congressman that “he had never united himself to any church, because he found difficulty in giving assent, without mental reservation, to the long complicated statements of Christian doctrine, which characterize their Articles of belief and Confessions of Faith. ‘When any church,’ he continued, ‘will inscribe over its altar, as its sole qualification for membership the Saviour’s condensed statement of the substance of both law and Gospel, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself,” that church will I join with all my heart and all my soul.”’⁴⁹¹ He identified with a man who asserted that “when he did good he felt good, when he did bad he felt bad.” That, Lincoln said, “is my religion.”⁴⁹²

Lincoln was doubtless repelled by the narrow sectarianism which precipitated the quarrels and bitter feuding that he had witnessed as a youth. In Indiana, Sophie Hanks heard Lincoln declare “that if he could take the best parts from all the churches, he could make a new church better than any of them.”⁴⁹³ He told a New Salem friend, “I’d like to go to church if I could hear a good sermon. About all one hears is one preacher get up and denounce another or run down the denomination he preaches for.”⁴⁹⁴ An exception to this

⁴⁹⁰ Fell to Ward Hill Lamon, Normal, Illinois, 26 September 1870, Jeremiah S. Black Papers, Library of Congress. Cf. Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 579. Fell, born a Quaker, became a Unitarian.

⁴⁹¹ Henry C. Deming, Eulogy of Abraham Lincoln (Hartford: A. N. Clark, 1865), 42.

⁴⁹² Dillard C. Donnohue, interview with Jesse W. Weik, 13 February 1887, Davis and Wilson, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 602.

⁴⁹³ Dr. James LeGrande (paraphrasing remarks he heard from his mother, Sophie Hanks), undated interview with Arthur E. Morgan, Morgan Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁹⁴ The Rev. Mr. L. R. Cronkhite, “The Church Lincoln Didn’t Join,” The Christian Century, 6 February 1935, p. 170. Sam Wilson was the friend to whom Lincoln made this remark.

rule was Josephus Hewitt, a Campbellite minister who read law with Stephen T. Logan; Lincoln was quite taken with his preaching.⁴⁹⁵

Innately tolerant and forbearing, Lincoln was doubtless offended by the harshness of frontier Calvinism.⁴⁹⁶ Because he often spent weekends at George Spears's home in Clary's Grove, he probably attended the Clary's Grove Baptist Church, of which his host was a leading member and at whose home the church had been formed. In the 1820s and 1830s, that church treated its congregants' weaknesses severely.⁴⁹⁷ Discipline was also punitive at the Rock Creek Church, presided over by John M. Berry, father of Lincoln's unfortunate business partner, William F. Berry.⁴⁹⁸ A Cumberland Presbyterian, the preacher was a large, powerful man with a strong voice and a reputation for theological rigidity.⁴⁹⁹ One contemporary thought him "uncompromising in his opposition to all that he thought to be wrong" and "unyielding in his convictions."⁵⁰⁰ The biographers of William F. Berry called the parson a man of "narrow dogmatism," full of "furious impatience with those who differed from him."⁵⁰¹ In his congregation the "idea prevailed that every little offense should be

⁴⁹⁵ Abner Y. Ellis, statement for Herndon, enclosed in Ellis to Herndon, Moro, Illinois, 23 January 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 175; *ibid.*, 581n.

⁴⁹⁶ On the harshness of Calvinistic morality in New Salem, see Laura Isabelle Osborne Nance, A Piece of Time (In Lincoln Country), ed. Georgia Goodwin Creager (n.p.: n.p., n.d.), 11-13.

⁴⁹⁷ Cronkhite, "The Church Lincoln Didn't Join," 170-72. The church was organized on Christmas day in 1824. Illinois Woman's Columbian Club of Menard County, Menard, Salem, Lincoln Souvenir Album (Petersburg, Illinois: Pantagraph, 1893), unpaginated (page headed "The First Settlers").

⁴⁹⁸ John Berry's life is summarized in Alice Keach Bone, Rock Creek: A Retrospective of One Hundred Years (n.p.: n.p., 1922), 39-43.

⁴⁹⁹ John McNamar to Herndon, Petersburg, Illinois, 25 November 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 422.

⁵⁰⁰ Quoted in a draft of Zarel C. Spears and Robert S. Barton, Lincoln and Berry, p. 23, typescript, Robert S. Barton Papers, University of Illinois. Cf. Bone, Rock Creek, 40.

⁵⁰¹ Draft of Zarel C. Spears and Robert S. Barton, Lincoln and Berry, p. 54, typescript, Robert S. Barton Papers, University of Illinois. According to his great-grandson, the Rev. Mr. Berry "pressed the deacons to dismiss from his church a woman who returned a veil at a Sunday morning service, that she had borrowed for

taken note of and brought before the church. A church trial was a common affair.”⁵⁰² The Rev. Mr. Berry was not always kind to his offspring. After his daughter, Mary Harriet, wed at the age of fourteen, he did not speak to her for the rest of her life. When her first-born child died, he refused to attend the funeral, but he did cease working in his garden as the procession passed by en route to the burial ground.⁵⁰³ Lincoln was probably repelled by such unforgiving, hard-hearted inhumanity by a man purportedly espousing the gospel of a savior who counseled: “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” He often discussed religion with Isaac Cogdal, who reported that Lincoln “did not believe in Hell – Eternal punishment as the christians say – his idea was punishment as Educational.”⁵⁰⁴ Lincoln committed to memory Robert Burns’s poem, “Holy Willie’s Prayer,” which satirized Christian dogma, especially predestination:

O Thou that in the heavens does dwell!,
 Wha, as it pleases best Thysel’,
 Sends ane to heaven and ten to hell,
 A’ for Thy glory,
 And no for ony gude or ill

some worldly occasion. He also pressed for dismissal from his church, his nephew James, . . . whom he saw cutting across the field on Sunday with a fox over his shoulder.” In 1938, Arthur Smedley, grandson of William F. Berry’s sister, Mary Harriet Berry Spears, told this to Zarel C. Spears. Smedley had heard it from his grandmother. Spears to Robert S. Barton, Bedford Hills, N.Y., 24 October 1938, *ibid.*

⁵⁰² Bone, Rock Creek, 17. According to Bone, “one time a quarrel over a goose which one woman claimed and which she said her neighbor had picked, was brought to the church officers for settlement. Witnesses were called; hard feelings were engendered; the community took sides; strife ran high and peace was absent.”

⁵⁰³ Zarel C. Spears to Robert S. Barton, Ottawa, Kansas, 8 October 1938, and Bedford Hills, N.Y., 24 October 1938, Robert S. Barton Papers, University of Illinois. See the draft of Zarel C. Spears and Robert S. Barton, Lincoln and Berry, 45-51, typescript, *ibid.* Spears reported what Mary Harriet Berry Spears told her grandson, Arthur Smedley. Smedley’s mother was Amanda Spears, daughter of Mary Harriet Spears. He lived with Mary Harriet Spears from 1908 to her death in 1913. They were both blind. Zarel Spears called the parson an “unrelenting old coot.”

⁵⁰⁴ Cogdal, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 441. See also William H. Hanna, interview with Herndon, *ibid.*, 458.

They've done before Thee.

This poem, according to James H. Matheny, “was L[incoln’s] religion.”⁵⁰⁵

Matheny’s father, a strong Methodist who loved Lincoln wholeheartedly, nonetheless hesitated to vote for him because of his reputation as a skeptic.⁵⁰⁶ Lincoln poked fun at the doctrine of eternal damnation by telling a story about Springfield’s orthodox preachers, who sought to combat a recently-arrived Universalist minister. A Methodist parson began his sermon critical of the newcomer with this emphatic declaration: “Why, the impertinent fellow declared that all shall be saved, but, my dear brethren, let us hope for better things.”⁵⁰⁷

In 1834, notwithstanding his reputed deism, Lincoln was able, with the help of Democrats, to win the legislative seat that he had unsuccessfully sought two years earlier.⁵⁰⁸ On election day, he and twelve others vied for Sangamon County’s four seats in the General Assembly. To improve their chances, the Democratic leadership in Springfield distributed to each precinct tickets with the names of four Democrats for whom the party faithful were supposed to cast their ballots. At the Lake Fork precinct, the tickets vanished before the polls opened. Lincoln’s resourceful friend Hawkins Taylor had obtained more than one hundred blank tickets on which he wrote the name “Lincoln,” among others. As Taylor later recalled,

⁵⁰⁵ Matheny, interviews with Herndon, 3 May 1866 and [by 2 March 1870], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 251, 577.

⁵⁰⁶ James H. Matheny, interview with Herndon, November 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 432.

⁵⁰⁷ Reminiscences of Cornelius Cole, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 5 February 1923.

⁵⁰⁸ Lincoln, with 1376 votes, ran second in a field of thirteen. The top vote-getter, John Dawson, received only fourteen votes more than Lincoln. Coming in third was William Carpenter, whose tally was 206 less than Lincoln’s. Pease, ed., Illinois Election Returns, 275. In the New Salem village precinct, Lincoln won 250 votes, Dawson 179, Carpenter 153, John Todd Stuart 109, Richard Quinton, 67, Andrew McCormick 47, Thomas Neale, 50. The State senate vote was Elkin, 120; Taylor, 140; Governor Duncan, 64; Kinney, 150. In the outlying precinct, where John Neal and W. M. Neal lived, Lincoln received 36 votes, Stuart 37, Carpenter 30,

none of the voters “had ever seen Mr. Lincoln, and few of them had ever heard of him. I let each man name whom he pleased for Governor and the other state officers, but not one of them could name four members for the Legislature, and then I would get in Mr. Lincoln’s name.” According to Taylor, 108 of the 111 men who voted at Lake Fork cast a ballot for Lincoln. Taylor believed that elsewhere in the county, friends that Lincoln had made during the Black Hawk War “took an interest in him at the polls” and helped assure his victory.⁵⁰⁹

Lincoln won his seat without making any “concession of principle whatever,” Stephen T. Logan remembered. Lincoln, he said, “was as stiff as a man could be in his Whig doctrines.”⁵¹⁰ The candidate was delighted not only with the honor but also with the money he would receive. In 1853, he told a friend: “members of the legislature got four dollars a day, and four dollars a day was more than I had ever earned in my life.”⁵¹¹

By the end of 1834, the piece of human driftwood who had three and a half years earlier washed up on the banks of the Sangamon at New Salem was transformed. Though still “a mighty rough man,” he had acquired a sense of direction.⁵¹² Having chosen his career as a politician, he would pursue it single-mindedly, distancing himself ever further from the backward, provincial, isolated, ignorant world of Thomas Lincoln.

Quinton, 24, McCormick 4, Baker 4, Shepard 3, Neale 10, Joseph Duncan 31, Kinney 10. Sangamon County Commissioners, Court Records, New Salem Poll Books, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁵⁰⁹ Hawkins Taylor, “Early Reminiscences,” Peoria Weekly Journal, 1895, copied in Emma Siggins White, Genealogy of the Descendants of John Walker of Wigton, Scotland ([Kansas City, Mo.]: Press of Tiernan-Dart Printing Company, 1902), 430. Hawkins Taylor lived in Middletown, halfway between Springfield and Peoria. In 1836, he moved to Keokuk, Iowa, where he became mayor and eventually led the Republican party. Recollections of Taylor, Gate City (Keokuk, Iowa), n.d., copied in The National View, 11 June 1887, clipping, John G. Nicolay Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵¹⁰ Stephen T. Logan, interview with John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 6 July 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 36.

⁵¹¹ Leonard Swett in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 466. During his four terms as a legislator, Lincoln received in salary a total of \$1762. In his first term, he was paid \$3 per day; in his remaining terms, \$4 per day. Pratt, Finances of Lincoln, 19-24.

⁵¹² Ninian W. Edwards, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 446.