

Chapter Seven

“I Have Got the Preacher by the Balls”:

Pursuing a Seat in Congress (1843-1847)

In 1843, Mary Lincoln, “anxious to go to Washington,” urged her husband to run for Congress.¹ He required little goading, for his ambition was strong and his chances seemed favorable.² Voters in the Sangamon region had sent a Whig, John Todd Stuart, to Congress in the two previous elections; whoever secured that party’s nomination to run for Stuart’s seat would probably win.³

POLITICAL RIVALS

Lincoln faced challengers, the most important of whom were his friends John J. Hardin and Edward D. Baker. Charming, magnetic, and strikingly handsome, the

¹ Reminiscences of a son (perhaps William G. Beck) of the proprietress of the Globe Tavern, Mrs. Sarah Beck, widow of James Beck (d. 1828), in Effie Sparks, “Stories of Abraham Lincoln,” 30-31, manuscript, Ida M. Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College. On Mrs. Beck, see Boyd B. Stutler, “Mr. Lincoln’s Landlady,” The American Legion Magazine 36 (1944): 20, 46-47; James T. Hickey, “The Lincolns’ Globe Tavern: A Study in Tracing the History of a Nineteenth-Century Building” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 56 (1963): 639-41. In 1843-44, Mrs. Beck rented the Globe from Cyrus G. Saunders. See her testimony in the case of Barret v. Saunders & Beck, 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, case file # 02608. The Illinois congressional elections scheduled for 1842 had been postponed one year because of delays in carrying out the reapportionment necessitated by the 1840 census.

² On Lincoln’s ambition, see Michael Burlingame, The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 236-67.

³ Donald W. Riddle, Lincoln Runs for Congress (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1948), 44-59.

English-born Baker was a renowned orator with a wide range of interests and talents: he could sing, dance, play the piano, and compose poetry. Like Lincoln, Baker had grown up in poverty. His ambition was so intense that when he discovered that he was ineligible for the presidency because of his English birth, he allegedly wept as he criticized his parents: “In justice to me they might have come to America a few years earlier.”

Impulsive, eager for glory, Baker won many friends – among them Lincoln – with his personal warmth, commanding presence, generosity, and joie de vivre.⁴ He had “an unequal power over the young,” who loved and followed him “with cheers & vim where he led, asking no questions.”⁵

Baker and Lincoln were the best Whig speakers in central Illinois. Baker’s “wonderful voice” was “not too strong nor loud and piercing, but clear as a bell, and perfectly modulated.”⁶ His oratory featured “a rare fluency of word and phrase and a contagious fire of enthusiasm that carried his listeners with him as if by fascination.”⁷ His “infallible memory, his quickness of perception, and his ardent eloquence,” along with the “silver snarling trumpet of his voice” and his “bonhomie and impetuosity of delivery,” made Baker “irresistible to Western men” who served on the juries he addressed and who flocked to his political orations. On the stump his “ready, sparkling, ebullient wit – the glancing and playful satire, mirthful while merciless – the keen syllogisms – and the sharp sophisms, whose fallacies, though undiscoverable, were

⁴ Milton H. Shutes, “Colonel E. D. Baker,” California Historical Society Quarterly 17 (1938): 303, 312; Gayle Anderson Braden, “The Public Career of Edward Dickinson Baker” (Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1960), 44-51.

⁵ William H. Herndon, “Analysis of Character of Abraham Lincoln,” lecture delivered in December 1865 at Springfield, Abraham Lincoln Quarterly 1 (December 1941): 436.

⁶ Clark E. Carr, My Day and Generation (Chicago: McClurg, 1908), 263.

⁷ John G. Nicolay memorandum dictated to Maud Williams, n.d., “Military” folder, box 11, Nicolay Papers, Library of Congress.

perplexing – and the sudden splendors of eloquence” formed “the wonderful charm of his backwoods harangues.”⁸

Not everyone admired Baker. Charles H. Ray spoke dismissively of his “frothy, ginger beer oratory,” and William Herndon recalled that Baker’s “style and matter were not absolutely original – nor deep – nor exact – not what the world calls philosophic.”⁹ Other critics objected to Baker’s lack of “moral worth & stability of character.”¹⁰ John J. Crittenden thought his “moral weight is not as great as it should be.”¹¹ Baker’s law partner, Stephen T. Logan, characterized him as “a brilliant man but very negligent” and complained that “I could not trust him in money matters. He got me into some scrapes by collecting and using money.”¹² (At the time of his death early in the Civil War, Baker had failed to account for \$10,000 that he had been given to raise a regiment.)¹³ Another law

⁸ John Hay, “Colonel Baker,” Harper’s New Monthly Magazine 24 (December 1861), and “The Heroic Age in Washington,” a lecture given in the early 1870s, in Michael Burlingame, ed., At Lincoln’s Side: John Hay’s Civil War Correspondence and Selected Writings (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 122, 154, 158; Hay, Washington correspondence, 22 October, Missouri Republican (St. Louis), 27 October 1861, in Michael Burlingame, ed., Lincoln’s Journalist: John Hay’s Anonymous Writings for the Press (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 123.

⁹ Charles H. Ray to Thomas Ford, 25 August 1845, Governor’s Correspondence, Illinois State Archives, quoted in Braden, “Baker,” 50; Herndon, “Analysis of Character of Lincoln,” 437.

¹⁰ David Davis to [William P. Walker], Springfield, Illinois, 25 June 1847, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. In 1845, Davis called Baker, who had recently won election to Congress, “a queer fellow – the most restless man in the world, and of unbounded ambition. He has genius and talents of a high order, and if he does not fritter himself away by too much speaking, he will gain some credit in Washington.” David Davis to Julius Rockwell, Bloomington, Illinois, 17 December 1845, transcript, Rockwell Papers, Lenox Public Library, Lenox, Massachusetts.

¹¹ Joshua F. Speed to Lincoln, [Frankfort, Kentucky], 13 February 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. See Speed to Herndon, Louisville, 14 February 1866, Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements about Abraham Lincoln (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 212-13, and Lincoln to Speed, Washington, 20 February 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:28-29.

¹² Logan, interview with John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 6 July 1875, Michael Burlingame, ed., An Oral History of Abraham Lincoln: John G. Nicolay’s Interviews and Essays (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 37, 38.

¹³ Statement by General Lorenzo Thomas, stenographic minutes of a meeting of the War Board of the War Department, 21 March 1862, Edwin M. Stanton Papers, Library of Congress. See also Benjamin P. Thomas and Harold M. Hyman, Stanton: The Life and Times of Lincoln’s Secretary of War (New York: Knopf, 1962), 160, and Braden, “Baker,” 239-53.

partner, Isaac Jones Wistar, recalled that Baker “cared nothing for money, squandering his large fees as fast as received, and in spite of his great earnings, was most generally penniless.” (After his untimely death in 1861, his family was left destitute.) There was, said Wistar, “absolutely no trace of order or system” about his “ill-regulated and erratic character.” Baker kept no financial records, “not even a docket of his cases, relying solely on his memory and a mass of papers carried in his hat and about his person.”¹⁴ He “acquired a habit of negligence in study and preparation and business, which largely thwarted his high promise of usefulness and fame.”¹⁵ In many ways, Baker seemed a perpetual adolescent.¹⁶

Some contemporaries criticized the “excessive protuberance of the organ of self esteem upon Mr. B’s cranium.”¹⁷ Nothing “pleased him more than to be told that he resembled the first Napoleon.”¹⁸ After a speech, he would “go around the crowd to catch what it might say” about his oratory; Usher Linder wrote that he “had more of this kind of vanity than any man I ever saw.”¹⁹ Mary Lincoln’s cousin Elizabeth Grimsley found Baker insufferably arrogant. “Col. E. D. Baker breakfasted with us,” she told a friend in 1861. “I cannot bear that man. He seems to have such a supreme contempt for lesser

¹⁴ Isaac Jones Wistar, Autobiography of Isaac Jones Wistar, 1827-1905 (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Wistar Institute, 1914), 1:303-4; William Brackett to Elihu B. Washburne, San Francisco, 7 December 1863, Washburne Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁵ John G. Nicolay memorandum dictated to Maud Williams, n.d., “Military” folder, box 11, Nicolay Papers, Library of Congress. As a lawyer, Joseph Wallace wrote, Baker was “disinclined to close, continuous study, and often negligent in the preparation of his cases.” Joseph Wallace, Sketch of the Life and Public Services of Edward D. Baker (Springfield: Journal Company, 1870), 16, 115.

¹⁶ Braden, “Baker,” 275.

¹⁷ Chicago Democrat, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Register (Vandalia), 18 May 1838.

¹⁸ Wallace, Sketch of Baker, 16, 115.

¹⁹ Linder, Reminiscences, 252. See also William Bissell to Joseph Gillespie, Washington, 8 February 1850, Gillespie Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

intellects, that it quite lowers his own in my estimation.”²⁰ In 1849, Baker’s “impudent dictation and indelicate sollicitation” for a cabinet position “was look[ed] upon rather as a joke than any thing else, for it was hardly supposed, that his vanity, great as it was known to be, could lead him to such an extreme as to aspire to a place for which he is so entirely unfitted.”²¹

For all his faults, Baker inspired in Lincoln a deep, fraternal affection. In 1846, he named his second son Edward Baker Lincoln. Together the two men practiced law, championed the Whig party, and debated religion.²² Lincoln “loved him like a brother.”²³

Lincoln’s other rival for the congressional nomination, John J. Hardin, was a third cousin to Mary Lincoln and “a man of large family influence, and [an] especial favorite among the old Kentucky Whigs of the district.” He had “in a high degree those powers of . . . ingratiating himself with the people.”²⁴ A Springfield lobbyist called him “a saucy, jolly, good-natured fellow, when treated kindly, but as ‘savage as a meat axe’ when assailed.” His “butcher-knife wit” and “bold merciless sarcasm” were “irresistible.” He “knows every thing, recollects every thing, and can call it up to his use whenever he wants it. No weak point in his foe escapes his notice. Nor will he let his victim escape

²⁰ Elizabeth J. Grimsley to John Todd Stuart, Washington, 8 May 1861, Grimsley Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

²¹ Jefferson Davis to John J. Crittenden, Washington, 30 January 1849, Haskell M. Monroe, Jr. et al., eds., The Papers of Jefferson Davis (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971-), 4:9; C. C. Washburn to Truman Smith, Mineral Point, Wisconsin, 18 January 1849, copy, E. B. Washburne Papers, Library of Congress.

²² J. Otis Humphrey to I. W. Read, n.p., 9 March 1892, copy, Paul Angle Papers, Chicago History Museum.

²³ William O. Stoddard, “White House Sketch No. 6,” New York Citizen, 22 September 1866, in Stoddard, Inside the White House in War Times: Memoirs and Reports of Lincoln’s Secretary, ed. Michael Burlingame (1890; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 167.

²⁴ Undated reminiscence by a friend and ally of Lincoln (probably Benjamin F. James), typescript, reference files of the Abraham Lincoln Association, folder marked “Campaign – 1846,” Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

until he has ‘hung his hide on the fence.’” Though “one of the ablest men in the State,” Hardin was not an agreeable speaker: “When he commences it is in a stammering, hesitating, blundering manner; but this does not at all intimidate or trouble him, he stumbles on, until he gets fairly under way, when he goes it like a locomotive. He can neither be confused nor thrown off his guard – he is always ready cocked and primed; whether to skin a witless babbler or argue a grave constitutional question.”²⁵ The wife of Governor Joseph Duncan described Hardin as a “plain blunt man when his indignation was aroused [–] woe to the man who . . . felt the heavy strokes of his ‘meat-axe oratory.’”²⁶

Born in Kentucky a year after Lincoln, Hardin imbibed politics from his father, Martin D. Hardin, a U.S. senator, secretary of state of Kentucky, and a leading attorney whose fierce manner made him resemble “a kitchen knife whetted on a brick.”²⁷ After graduating from Transylvania University in Lexington, Hardin studied law with the chief justice of the Kentucky state supreme court. In 1830, he moved to Jacksonville, Illinois, where he quickly achieved eminence. During the Black Hawk War he became a major general of state militia, and in 1836 won a seat in the General Assembly, to which he was reelected in 1838 and 1840. Colleagues in the legislature deemed him “clever,” “firm,” “fearless,” and “smart.”²⁸ Lincoln characterized the intensely ambitious Hardin as a “man of desperate energy and perseverance” who “never backs out” and who was “talented and

²⁵ “A lobby member” to the editor, 31 December 1840, Quincy Whig, 16 January 1841.

²⁶ Elizabeth Caldwell Smith Duncan, biographical sketch of Hardin, [1866], manuscript in the Duncan-Putnam Family Papers, Putnam Museum, Davenport, Iowa.

²⁷ Washington correspondence, 2 January 1894, Boston Herald, n.d., clipping, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

²⁸ William Brown to Jeremiah Brown, Jr., Delevan, 25 December 1843, typed copy, Jesse W. Fell Papers, Library of Congress; David Davis to Julius Rockwell, Bloomington, Illinois, 14 May 1844, transcript, Rockwell Papers, Lenox Public Library, Lenox, Massachusetts.

energetic, usually generous and magnanimous.”²⁹ Though Lincoln referred to him as “our best whig,” he may have resented the jeering taunts that Hardin directed at him in December 1840, when he publicly alluded to Lincoln’s recent exit through a window in an attempt to block a legislative quorum.³⁰

During the winter of 1842-1843, Lincoln began his quest for the congressional nomination, which was to be decided at a convention in May.³¹ On February 14, Lincoln told a Beardstown attorney and Whig leader, “if you should hear any one say that Lincoln don’t want to go to Congress, I wish you as a personal friend of mine would tell him you have reason to believe he is mistaken. The truth is, I would like to go very much.”³² Two weeks thereafter, at a meeting of Whigs in Springfield, Lincoln drew up the party platform, which opposed direct federal taxes and endorsed a protective tariff, a national bank, the distribution to the states of proceeds from federal land sales, and the convention system of choosing candidates.³³ Three days later there appeared a circular, written by Lincoln, elaborating on the various planks.³⁴ In discussing import duties, he indulged in

²⁹ Lincoln to Robert Boal, Springfield, 7 January 1846, and to B. F. James, Springfield, 14 January 1846, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:353, 354.

³⁰ Speech in Congress, 27 July 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:515. At the time Hardin made these critical remarks, Lincoln was temporarily acting as speaker of the Illinois House of Representatives. Springfield’s Democratic newspaper called Hardin’s criticism the “unkindest thing we have witnessed during the session, to say nothing of its impropriety The dignity of the House requires, that the occupant of the Chair for the time being, be he who he may, should be treated with ordinary respect and courtesy, and consequently no allusions should be made in debate which are calculated to bring him into ridicule or contempt.” Illinois State Register (Springfield), 18 December 1840.

³¹ The district convention was postponed from March to May as a courtesy to Hardin, who had mistakenly believed that it was originally scheduled for May and had left Illinois for a visit to Kentucky. Announcement by the state central committee, 16 March 1843, Illinois Gazette (Lacon), 1 April 1843.

³² Lincoln to Richard S. Thomas, Springfield, 14 February 1843, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:307. That same day he asked for the support of Alden Hull from Tazewell County. Lincoln to Hull, Springfield, 14 February 1843, ibid., 1:306-7.

³³ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:307-8.

³⁴ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:309-18. The document bore the signatures of Lincoln, Stephen Trigg Logan, and Albert T. Bledsoe, but Lincoln told Hardin and John Bennett that he wrote the document.

mild demagoguery, implausibly arguing that a protective tariff would burden “the wealthy and luxurious few, while the substantial laboring men . . . go entirely free.” Only those “whose pride, whose abundance of means, prompt them to spurn the manufactures of our country, and to strut in British cloaks and coats and pantaloons, may have to pay a few cents more on the yard for the cloth that makes them.” Sarcastically Lincoln remarked: “A terrible evil, truly, to the Illinois farmer, who never wore, nor ever expects to wear, a single yard of British goods in his whole life.” The tariff was far preferable to a system of direct federal taxation, under which “the land must be literally covered with assessors and collectors, going forth like swarms of Egyptian locusts, devouring every blade of grass and every other green thing.” All citizens would thus “be perpetually haunted and harassed by the tax-gatherer.” Lincoln ridiculed opponents of Clay’s plan to distribute the proceeds of federal land sales: “Many silly reasons are given, as is usual in cases where a single good one is not to be found.” Lincoln’s intense hostility toward Whig deserters was reflected in the circular’s denunciation of John Reynolds, William L. D. Ewing, and Richard M. Young, all of whom had been helped by the Whigs and who then became “perseveringly vindictive in their assaults upon all our men and measures.” Whigs must adopt the convention system, Lincoln argued, for “while our opponents use it, it is madness in us not to defend ourselves with it.” Without nominating conventions, there could be none of the party unity so essential for victory. “If two friends aspire to the same office it is certain that both cannot succeed. Would it not, then, be much less painful to have the question decided by mutual friends some time before, than to snarl and quarrel until the day of the election and then both be beaten by the common enemy?” To

Lincoln to Hardin, Springfield, 11 May 1843, and to Bennett, 7 March 1843, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:323, 318.

illustrate the point, Lincoln employed a Scriptural aphorism that he would famously reuse in 1858: “he whose wisdom surpasses that of all philosophers has declared that ‘a house divided against itself cannot stand.’”³⁵

During the first three weeks of March, supporters of Baker and Lincoln battled strenuously. “If we are to believe either of the two factions,” remarked Springfield’s Democratic paper, “it would be difficult to decide which is the bigger rascal.”³⁶ When the Sangamon County Whigs met in Springfield on March 20, Baker won the party’s endorsement for Congress, much to the chagrin of Lincoln and his wife. Mary Lincoln’s “anger got the better of her, and Lincoln had an unpleasant time in consequence,” as she berated him for not exerting himself hard enough to win.³⁷ She may have had a valid point, for the Illinois State Register reported that when the convention met, it looked as though Baker commanded an overwhelming majority and “several persons asked Mr. Lincoln to decline about 12 o’clock, on account of Mr. Baker’s being so far ahead of him.” The accommodating Lincoln agreed to withdraw, only to discover that Baker’s lead was much smaller than he had thought. For several days, Baker’s friends “had been extremely active” and had “taken the trouble to bring in persons early in the morning, hostile to Mr. Lincoln; and thus a powerful and desperate effort being made in behalf of Mr. Baker, he succeeded by a meagre majority in procuring the nomination.” If Lincoln had fought throughout the afternoon, he might have been nominated, according to the

³⁵ Campaign circular, 4 March 1843, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:309-18. In the gospel according to St. Matthew (12:25), Jesus says: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand.”

³⁶ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 17 March 1843.

³⁷ Sparks, “Stories of Abraham Lincoln,” 30-31.

Register.³⁸ He may also have won if he had labored harder in the weeks before the convention. Evidently overconfident, Lincoln failed to emulate the industrious Baker, who “worked like a beaver at the preliminary meetings throughout the county, and played his game so well that his friends had the ascendancy,” to Lincoln’s “utter astonishment and mortification.”³⁹

Lincoln ascribed the defeat to his undeserved reputation as “the candidate of pride, wealth, and aristocratic family distinction.”⁴⁰ Abner Y. Ellis recalled that “Some of Bakers freinds accused Mr Lincoln of belonging to a proud and an eresticratic family Meaning the Edw[ar]ds & Todds I suppose and when it came to Mr Lincoln[’]s ears – he laughed Verry hartially and remarked – Well that sounds strange to me for said he I do not remember of but one [member of those families] that ever came to See Me and While he Was in town he Was accused of Stealing a Jews Harp.”⁴¹ Lincoln may have laughed at one point, but just after his defeat, he confided bitterly to a friend his astonishment that he could have been regarded as an aristocrat, for he had arrived in Sangamon County in 1831 “a strange, friendless, uneducated, penniless boy, working on a flatboat at ten dollars per month.” Religious considerations also worked against him, Lincoln maintained: “Baker is a Campbellite; and therefore, as I suppose, with few exceptions got all that church.” (Campbellites, followers of Alexander Campbell, were also known as Reformed Baptists and later as Disciples of Christ.) Mary Todd had relatives in the Presbyterian and Episcopal churches, “and therefore wherever it would tell, I was set

³⁸ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 24 March 1843.

³⁹ Springfield correspondence by Henry Villard, 26 December, Cincinnati Commerical, 31 December 1860.

⁴⁰ Lincoln to Martin M. Morris, Springfield, 26 March 1843, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:320.

⁴¹ Abner Y. Ellis to Herndon, Moro, Illinois, 14 February 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 211.

down as either the one or the other.” In addition, Lincoln complained, it was said that “no Christian ought to go for me, because I belonged to no church and was suspected of being a deist.” Moreover, his reputation suffered because he “had talked about fighting a duel.”⁴² To combat his image as an aristocrat, he told James Matheny “with great Emphasis” that despite his marriage into the Springfield elite, “I am now and always shall be the same Abe Lincoln that I always was.”⁴³

The views that Lincoln expressed on temperance a year earlier may also have injured his candidacy.⁴⁴ At that time, an observer remarked, the temperance movement in Springfield was sweeping “everything before it.”⁴⁵ The local chapter of the Washington Temperance Society (a precursor of Alcoholics Anonymous), which had been founded late in 1841 after proselytes from Alton had stirred up interest, attracted over 350 members by year’s end.⁴⁶ In his remarks before the society, Lincoln chided self-righteous, “uncharitable,” “cold-blooded,” and “feelingless” reformers who excoriated drunkards as “the authors of all the vice and misery and crime in the land,” whose “houses were the workshops of the devil,” and who “should be shunned by all the good and virtuous” as “utterly incorrigible . . . moral pestilences.” He praised drunkards as

⁴² Lincoln to Martin M. Morris, Springfield, 26 March 1843, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:320.

⁴³ James H. Matheny, interview with Herndon, 3 May 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 251.

⁴⁴ While in the legislature, Lincoln had the chance to express his views on temperance by voting on various licensing measures. But the record of his votes and remarks is too fragmentary to permit any clear statement of how he felt about temperance legislation. Paul M. Angle, “Lincoln and Liquor,” Bulletin of the Abraham Lincoln Association 27 (1932): 4-5.

⁴⁵ Walter Davis to Lewina Parks, Salt Creek, Illinois, 10 February 1842, “letter read at Miss Gillett’s, May 1926,” copy in the notes of Elizabeth Putnam Duncan, box 6, folder 3, Duncan-Putnam Family Papers, Putnam Museum, Davenport, Iowa. On the temperance movement in Springfield, see Kenneth J. Winkle, The Young Eagle: The Rise of Abraham Lincoln (Dallas: Taylor, 2001), 284-88.

⁴⁶ Sangamo Journal, 31 December 1841.

people whose heads and hearts generally “will bear an advantageous comparison with those of any other class.” Indeed, Lincoln declared, there “seems ever to have been a proneness in the brilliant, and the warm-blooded, to fall into this vice. The demon of intemperance seems to have delighted in sucking the blood of genius and of generosity.” To his Christian audience he appealed for forbearance: “If they believe, as they profess, that Omnipotence condescended to take on himself the form of sinful man, and as such die an ignominious death, surely they will not refuse submission to the infinitely lesser condescension, for the temporal and perhaps eternal salvation of a large, erring, and unfortunate class of their fellow creatures.”⁴⁷

This last sentence offended devout Christians, who interpreted it as a criticism of their piety. Insulted and outraged members of Lincoln’s audience said as they were leaving the church: “It’s a shame that he should be permitted to abuse us so in the house of the Lord.” The Washington Society counted among its members recently reformed drunks who were too uncouth for the polite worshippers, and the address damaged Lincoln in the eyes of many churchgoers.⁴⁸

(When defending some female temperance activists who been found guilty of demolishing barrels of liquor, Lincoln told the judge: “it might be well to offset the money damages with the damage which might have resulted if the destroyed liquor had been used for beverage purposes.” The women were fined one cent.)⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:273, 278.

⁴⁸ 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), 165-66; Herndon, “Abraham Lincoln’s Religious Belief,” quoted in John E. Rensburg, Six Historic Americans, Paine, Jefferson, Washington, Franklin, Lincoln, Grant: The Fathers and Saviors of Our Republic, Freethinkers (New York: Truth Seeker, n.d.), 109. On the social background of the Washington Society leaders, see Winkle, The Young Eagle, 285-86.

⁴⁹ Lawrence Beaumont Stringer, “From the Sangamon to the Potomac: More Light on Abraham Lincoln,” typescript of an unpublished manuscript, p. 131, Edgar Dewitt Jones Papers, Detroit Public Library.

Over his protest, the Sangamon County Whigs chose Lincoln a delegate to the congressional district convention, where he was obliged to vote for Baker. Though he lamented that “I shall be fixed a good deal like a fellow who is made a groomsman to a man that has cut him out and is marrying his own dear ‘gal,’” Lincoln derived some solace from the action of the Menard County convention, which endorsed his candidacy.⁵⁰ “It is truly gratifying to me to learn that while the people of Sangamon have cast me off, my old friends of Menard [New Salem was located in what became Menard County], who have known me longest and best, stick to me,” he told Martin S. Morris.⁵¹ When Baker tried to get Menard’s two delegates to vote for him, Lincoln protested: “This is all wrong Upon the same rule, why might not I fly from the decision against me in Sangamon and get up instructions to their delegation to go for me? . . . I would as soon put my head in the fire as to attempt it.” He felt honor-bound not to hinder Baker’s nomination. “I should despise myself were I to attempt it,” he declared to Morris.⁵²

Baker had ample reason to woo the Menard County delegates, for John J. Hardin was emerging as a formidable rival. When the district convention assembled at Pekin on May 1, the Baker and Hardin forces were virtually deadlocked, with seventeen delegates favoring Hardin and sixteen leaning toward Baker.⁵³ Lincoln, the foremost advocate of

Stringer’s informant was Colonel Charles H. Miller, who witnessed the trial, which took place in Logan County. Miller lived in Lincoln, Illinois.

⁵⁰ Lincoln to Joshua Speed, Springfield, 24 March 1843, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:319; Sangamo Journal, 13 April 1843.

⁵¹ Lincoln to Morris, Springfield, 26 March 1843, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:320-21.

⁵² Riddle, Lincoln Runs for Congress, 69-70; Lincoln to Morris, Springfield, 26 March and 14 April 1843, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:320-22. Morris showed this letter to his fellow delegates. Greensburg, Indiana, correspondence, n.d., Cincinnati Enquirer, n.d., copied in the Chicago Tribune, 2 May 1880. Riddle concluded that there “can be no doubt that Baker acted discredibly.” The two delegates were Martin S. Morris and George U. Miles, who were instructed to support Lincoln as their first choice and Hardin as their second.

⁵³ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 5 May 1843.

Baker's candidacy, appealed to a Menard County delegate, George U. Miles: "Other Counties have gone for me & are instructed for me if I'm a candidate – I'll be nominated the 1st ballot – My honor is out with Baker. I'd Suffer my right arm to be cut off before I'd violate it. It is impossible for me to run. I, after the Nominations, will get up & decline and I want you to go for Baker. Menard – your two votes – will settle the question. Baker will be nominated." Miles refused, explaining that he and the other delegate from Menard County were "instructed to go for Hardin after you, and [I] will suffer my right arm Cut off before I'll violate my instructions."⁵⁴

There is reason to believe that Baker, in fairness, should have received the Menard County votes and hence the nomination. A week before the convention, John Bennett of Petersburg reported that two formal meetings and several informal ones, including militia musters, had been held at which Menard County Whigs expressed their preference. All things considered, Bennett said, "I suppose Baker has a majority."⁵⁵ According to a Democratic newspaper, Miles and his colleague "were originally instructed to go for Hardin" at a meeting "very thinly attended." Subsequently they "were instructed to go for Baker by 80 majority, at a meeting embracing nearly every whig vote in the county."⁵⁶ The turnout at both formal meetings was small.⁵⁷ A prominent Democrat

⁵⁴ James Monroe Ruggles, "Congressional Reminiscences," Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society 4 (1900): 38; George U. Miles, interview with Herndon, 9 October 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 368. The other delegate was Francis Regnier.

⁵⁵ John Bennett to Hardin, Petersburg, 25 April 1843, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum. William G. Spears, sheriff of Menard County, told Hardin that Baker won twenty-one or twenty-two votes at a meeting, which Hardin's friends virtually boycotted. Offsetting that poll was the vote at a muster in Clary's Grove, where Spears drafted a set of instructions for the delegates to the Pekin Convention. Only one signer favored Baker, while twenty-five to thirty favored Hardin. Spears to Hardin, Petersburg, Illinois, 24 April 1843, ibid.

⁵⁶ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 5 May 1843. See also "Another case of shuffling," ibid., 21 July 1843.

⁵⁷ John Bennett to Hardin, Petersburg, 25 April 1843, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum.

in Petersburg, Thomas L. Harris, asserted that he significantly helped Hardin secure the nomination.⁵⁸

After failing to win over the Menard delegates, Lincoln sought to help Baker with another tactic. Immediately following Hardin's nomination, Lincoln asked James Monroe Ruggles, the secretary of the convention, if he would favor a resolution supporting Baker for the next congressional term. When Ruggles answered affirmatively, Lincoln said: "You prepare the resolution – I will support it – and I think we can pass it." That resolution caused a stir, especially among Hardin's supporters. Introduced by Lincoln and moved by Ruggles, it said: "Resolved, That this convention, as individuals, recommend E. D. Baker as a suitable person to be voted for by the whigs of this district, for Representative to Congress, at the election in 1844, subject to the decision of a District Convention, should the whigs of the district think proper to hold one." Following a heated discussion, it passed by a vote of nineteen to fourteen. Just prior to that, a state senator, Dr. Robert S. Boal, had introduced resolutions deploring the instruction of

⁵⁸ "Hardin got his nomination for congress by the vote of Menard & . . . I did all I could that he might get it over Baker. I will not say that I got the vote of Menard for him, [though?] I might perhaps not misstate if I should say so." Thomas Harris to Charles Lanphier, Washington, 23 August 1850, Lanphier Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Harris is perhaps one of the men referred to in Martin S. Morris's letter to Hardin analyzing Hardin's failure to carry Menard County in the August general election, held in August: "it was caused principally by the division of the county candidates and capital that was made out of your speeches on the bankruptcy law[.] it has not been done so much by our political opponents as by persons professing to be whigs, they have cried out – bankruptcy and every thing else that could have any possible effect. They have resorted to the most vile and dishonorable means in order to defeat us, they even tried to raise the masonic question against [Nathan] Dresser and myself. I mean those gentlemen were the principle actors who manifested so much friendship towards you & that took so much trouble upon themselves as to go to the convention and help to nominate you, and then turn round and raise the cry of bankruptcy and do all they could against you and even vote against you, beautiful consistency indeed, but such is the fact, those men have done more to defeat the whig party in this county than all the locos in it." Those false-hearted men who supported Hardin at the convention and then turned on him were, in Morris's view, "wolves in sheeps clothing pretending to be whigs and at the same time acting with our enemies." They did "all they could to beat you." Morris to Hardin, Petersburg, 9, 22 August 1843, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum.

delegates to vote for a specific candidate; they were adopted by an eighteen to fifteen margin.⁵⁹

In mid-May, Lincoln told Joshua Speed that he would cheerfully abide by the results of the Pekin convention: “We shall have no split or trouble about the matter; all will be harmony.”⁶⁰ Simeon Francis urged Hardin to “banish every thought from your mind that there is dissatisfaction with your nomination.”⁶¹ Playfully, Lincoln challenged Hardin to a contest: if Sangamon County delivered a majority for Hardin more than double the majority that he won in his home county of Morgan, the Morgan County Whigs would have to throw a barbecue for their counterparts in Sangamon.⁶² To help make sure that he won this bet, Lincoln campaigned in Sangamon County “for weeks before the election, begging, coaxing and commanding the voters to come out to the polls,” but despite what he said to Speed, Lincoln apparently begrudged Hardin the nomination.⁶³ He may also have felt that Hardin’s triumph over Baker was unfair. (Hardin’s reputation for integrity was not spotless; some questioned his honesty.)⁶⁴ On election day Lincoln did not vote for Hardin, who won the district handily; instead he cast ballots only for justice of the peace and constable, refusing to express any preference for

⁵⁹ Pekin Palladium, n.d., copied in The Illinois Gazette (Lacon), 6 May 1843; Extra Journal (published as a campaign newspaper by the Sangamo Journal), 30 May 1843; J. M. Ruggles, “Reminiscences of the Pekin Convention and of Abraham Lincoln,” Ida M. Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College; Ruggles, “Congressional Reminiscences,” 39; Riddle, Lincoln Runs for Congress, 70-71.

⁶⁰ Lincoln to Joshua Speed, Springfield, 18 May 1843, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:323-25.

⁶¹ Francis to Hardin, Springfield, 11 May 1843, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum.

⁶² Lincoln to Hardin, Springfield, 11 May 1843, Basler, Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:322-23.

⁶³ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 11 August 1843. On August 5, Lincoln spoke at Petersburg in Menard County. Ibid., letter from Petersburg dated 8 August 1843. The Register sneeringly noted, “The Junto sent ‘Aunt Becca’ to Menard last week, to ‘talk to the doubtful.’ The old lady couldn’t come it.” Ibid. For a brief account of Lincoln’s speech in Hillsboro on July 15, see Basler, Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:327.

⁶⁴ State Senator William Jefferson Gatewood of Shawneetown said that “Hardin is hardly honest enough” to be a judge. Gatewood to Henry Eddy, Vandalia, 14 January 1835, Eddy Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

congressional or county office candidates.⁶⁵ Such uncharacteristically spiteful behavior suggests the intensity of his disappointment. That disappointment was shared by his wife, who “shed buckets full of tears” on the day that Hardin left Illinois to take his seat in Congress.⁶⁶

DOMESTIC LIFE

Mary Lincoln perhaps derived some consolation from the house she and her husband bought in 1844. When they left the Globe Tavern, they briefly moved into a small one-story house at 214 South Fourth Street.⁶⁷ On January 16, 1844, they purchased from Charles Dresser (the minister who had presided at their wedding ceremony) a one-and-a-half-story, five-room cottage at Eighth and Jackson Streets, where they spent the next seventeen years.⁶⁸ Lincoln gave Dresser \$1200 in cash and real estate worth \$300.⁶⁹ In May, Dresser handed over the deed to Lincoln, whose family moved in shortly thereafter. The house, conveniently located a few blocks from Lincoln’s office, was built in 1839.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Benjamin P. Thomas, “Lincoln: Voter and Candidate, part two,” Bulletin of the Abraham Lincoln Association 37 (1934): 7. Thomas called this act “a mystery” and wondered whether Lincoln was “showing his displeasure at Hardin, or at the county organization that had thrown him over, or both?” Thomas, Abraham Lincoln: A Biography (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), 104.

⁶⁶ Sparks, “Stories of Abraham Lincoln,” 30–31.

⁶⁷ George H. Helmle cited in Jacob C. Thompson to Albert J. Beveridge, Springfield, 19 May 1925, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress, and John E. Vaughn, “A Handful o’ Sorts,” Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 12 November 1927. W. A. Evans asserted that the Lincolns moved into a house on Monroe Street. Evans, Mrs. Abraham Lincoln, 130. Evans provides a picture of that dwelling (*ibid.*, opposite p. 138).

⁶⁸ According to a traditional story accepted by some residents of Springfield, Lincoln “went to Dr. Dresser early in the morning of the day of the wedding to engage his services. He found the minister at breakfast. It is surmised that the comfort and roominess of the cottage attracted the young lawyer’s attention and generated in him an affection which later resulted in the negotiations for its purchase.” Archibald L. Bowen, “A. Lincoln: His House,” Lincoln Centennial Association Papers, 1925, 26.

⁶⁹ Memorandum between Lincoln and Dresser, 16 January 1844, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:331.

⁷⁰ Wayne C. Temple, By Square & Compass: Saga of the Lincoln Home (revised ed.; Mahomet, Illinois: Mayhaven Publishing, 2002).

Mary Lincoln had been unpopular at the Globe Tavern, where the women boarders liked to hold small get-togethers in their rooms. Because they did not wish to invite her to join them, they would creep upstairs to the designated meeting site, fearful that she might guess where they were headed. They trod lightly as they passed her door, for they did not wish to arouse her anger.⁷¹ The Lincolns' marriage had gotten off to a poor start, as her flinging coffee in his face indicates. She regularly complained about her husband's failure to come to bed on time; when she retired for the night, he often excused himself to fill a water pitcher, and while downstairs doing so, he would sit on the porch and relate stories anyone who cared to listen. She would cough to signal that she wanted him to return to their room; sometimes he ignored her coughing till after midnight.⁷² She would occasionally retaliate by entertaining gentlemen callers in their room with the door locked, hoping to annoy her neglectful spouse.⁷³

Things at the Globe worsened after August 1, 1843, when Robert Todd Lincoln was born. (That day Lincoln jestingly told a friend that he had worried that the infant "might have one of my long legs and one of Mary's short ones, and he'd have a terrible time

⁷¹ Reminiscences of Mrs. George Chatterton, in Octavia Roberts, "'We All Knew Abr'ham,'" Abraham Lincoln Quarterly 4 (1946): 28; Octavia Roberts Corneau, "My Townsman – Abraham Lincoln," typescript of a talk given to the Lincoln Group of Boston, 18 November 1939, p. 14, Abraham Lincoln Association Reference Files, "Reminiscences" folder 5, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Mrs. Chatterton was the daughter of Charles Lanphier (editor of the Springfield Illinois State Register) and the wife of a prominent Springfield jeweler and proprietor of the Chatterton Opera House She boarded at the Globe at the same time the Lincolns did.

⁷² Sparks, "Stories of Abraham Lincoln," 20-21.

⁷³ "She used when boarding with Mrs. D Early to entertain gentlemen in her bedroom – with locked doors. Browning for one. No one imagines anything criminal was done. Her object was to irritate her husband. In Washington she tried it with Rosencranz and Halleck." Herndon allegedly told Caroline Dall, "Lincoln once told him that he never knew what a pure woman was like, till he met the army nurses in Washington." Caroline Dall, "Journal of a tour through Illinois, Wisconsin and Ohio, Oct. & Nov. 1866," entry for 29 October 1866, Dall Papers, Bryn Mawr College. Dall's sources were the documents gathered by William Herndon and conversations with people in Springfield. Among the documents were two small notebooks with highly sensitive material; in 1869 Herndon lent them to Ward Hill Lamon, who never returned them. They have evidently disappeared. Douglas L. Wilson, "Keeping Lincoln's Secrets," The Atlantic Monthly, May 2000, 78-88.

getting through the world.”)⁷⁴ Often baby Robert wailed loudly, much to the dismay of the other boarders, who threatened to leave the Globe if the Lincolns remained there.⁷⁵ (The delicate Robert suffered from a respiratory problem known as “summer complaint.”)⁷⁶ Mrs. Albert Taylor Bledsoe, who was then staying at the Globe, “never cared personally for Mrs. Lincoln” but nevertheless “went every day to her room . . . , washed and dressed the baby, and made the mother comfortable and the room tidy, for several weeks till Mrs. Lincoln was able to do these things for herself.” Mrs. Bledsoe’s six-year-old daughter Sophia, who was fond of infants, also helped care for little Robert.⁷⁷ She delighted in carrying the rather heavy baby about, “often dragging him through a hole in the fence between the tavern grounds and an adjacent empty lot, and laying him down in the high grass, where he contentedly lay awake or asleep, as the case might be.” Sophia Bledsoe “often since that time wondered how Mrs. Lincoln could have trusted a particularly small six-year-old with this charge.”⁷⁸ She said she was amazed that

⁷⁴ Reminiscences of Dr. A. W. French, Chicago Times-Herald, 25 August 1895. In 1848, Pennsylvania-born Dr. French, a dentist, settled in Springfield, where he took an active part in politics as an opponent of slavery. Lincoln made a similar quip to Joseph Thayer. Notation in George Pasfield Scrapbook, p. 120, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. In 1834, Joseph Thayer (b. 1786) moved from his native Massachusetts to Springfield, where he became a prominent merchant.

⁷⁵ Jacob C. Thompson, quoted in an unidentified clipping, datelined Springfield, February 12, story by Louis J. Humphrey, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana; Lawrence B. Stringer, unpublished biography of Lincoln, written ca. 1927, p. 194, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield

⁷⁶ Emily Huntington Stuart heard this from her mother, Mrs. George L. Huntington, who was a good friend of Mrs. Lincoln at that time. Stuart, “Some Recollections of the Early Days in Springfield and Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln and Other Celebrities who Lived in that Little Town in My Youth,” unpublished typescript, bound in *Daughters of the American Revolution*, Illinois branch, Genealogical Records, 3:110, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁷⁷ Sophia’s daughter said that “As Mr. Lincoln was unable to secure a nurse for his wife, my mother bathed the baby every morning for her.” Statement of Elizabeth McMurtrie Wayland, 16 August 1927, Carl Sandburg Papers, University of Illinois.

⁷⁸ Sophia Bledsoe Herrick, “Personal Recollections of My Father and Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Davis,” Rufus Rockwell Wilson, ed., Intimate Memories of Lincoln (Elmira, N.Y.: Primavera Press, 1945), 61 (originally published in the Methodist Review Quarterly of Nashville, October 1915).

“at that early age I missed doing him any damage,” but somehow Robert “went unscathed.”⁷⁹

When neither Mrs. Bledsoe nor her daughter was tending the infant, Lincoln helped out. One day as baby Robert was shrieking, Lincoln picked him up and carried him around the room while Mary sat by “silently weeping.” The proprietress of the Globe assured the couple that their child merely had colic and was in no danger. “Does it do any good to pack him round this way?” Lincoln asked. When told it did not, he, “glancing . . . at his wife . . . in a manner as though he expected her to protest,” said: “If it don’t do him any good, I’m damned if I don’t put him down.”⁸⁰ Mary Lincoln often asked her husband to care for Robert, whom he would wheel about in a baby carriage. When a neighbor criticized him, saying “that is a pretty business for you to be engaged in, when you ought to be down to your law office,” he replied simply: “I promised.”⁸¹

Lincoln performed other domestic chores; his wife, having grown up in a prosperous home with slaves to tend children, cook, and clean, felt that such duties were beneath her. While washing dishes one day in the mid-1840s, she was heard to sigh: “What would my poor father say if he found me doing this kind of work.”⁸² She did not always perform

⁷⁹ Sophia Bledsoe Herrick, Bledsoe Family History, typescript of excerpts made by David Rankin Barbee, Albert Taylor Bledsoe Papers, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

⁸⁰ Sparks, “Stories of Abraham Lincoln,” 23-24.

⁸¹ Paraphrased remarks of Mrs. John Bradford, a Springfield neighbor of the Lincolns, to Ida Tarbell, memo in “Mary Todd Lincoln” folder, Ida M. Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College; Mrs. John S. Bradford, quoted by Judith Bradner, in Walter B. Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Michael Burlingame (1916; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 94. John S. Bradford, a partner in the bookstore-cum-drugstore called Bradford and Johnson, lived at Jackson and Walnut Streets, several blocks from the Lincolns’ house. In the 1860 census he was listed as forty-five years old and his wife, identified as A. W. Bradford, was forty-two.

⁸² Harriet Hanks Chapman, interviewed by Jesse W. Weik, Charleston, Illinois, 16 October 1914, Jesse W. Weik, The Real Lincoln: A Portrait, ed. Michael Burlingame (1922; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 328. Harriet Chapman lived with the Lincolns for eighteen months in 1844 and 1845.

that task herself; when her son Robert when he was old enough, she delegated it to him.⁸³ In addition, she had her husband do the breakfast dishes and sometimes, wielding a piece of stove wood, drove him out of their house to fetch breakfast meat.⁸⁴ Page Eaton said that Lincoln “always used to do his own marketing . . . and before he went to Washington I used to see him at the baker’s and butcher’s every morning with his basket on his arm.”⁸⁵ Lincoln would rise early to buy fresh bread from Jim Hall. The day after his nomination for presidency in 1860, Lincoln, accompanied by a black boy, called as usual on Hall and said: “I am not ashamed to carry a loaf of bread home under my arm, but my wife says it is not dignified for a president-elect to carry bread under his arm through the streets, so, hereafter, this boy will come in my place.”⁸⁶ At that same time she also thought it undignified for her husband to milk their cow. A servant recollected that in the winter of 1860-61, Lincoln insisted on performing that duty “because he did not think I ought to expose myself. His wife, however, used to object to his doing the milking.”⁸⁷

Before her husband achieved national prominence, however, Mary Lincoln, according to a neighbor, “was quite disposed to make a servant girl” of him, compelling him “to get up and get the breakfast and then dress the children, after which she would join the

⁸³ Elizabeth Edwards, undated interview with Jesse W. Weik, Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 355.

⁸⁴ “Anecdotes of Mrs. Lincoln,” by “a neighbor of the family at the time of President Lincoln’s funeral,” quoted in The News (no city indicated), ca. 17 July 1882, unidentified clipping, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne; Herndon to Isaac N. Arnold, Springfield, 24 October [18]83, Lincoln Collection, Chicago History Museum.

⁸⁵ Reminiscences of Page Eaton, Belvedere, Illinois, Standard, 14 April 1868.

⁸⁶ Reminiscences of an old settler in Springfield, unidentified newspaper clipping, quoted in a memo in the John J. Duff Papers, box 1, folder 5, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁸⁷ Mrs. Mary Gaughan of 146 Cornelia Street, Springfield, quoted in “Lincoln’s Domestic Life,” unidentified clipping, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

family at the table, or lie abed an hour or two longer as she might choose.”⁸⁸ Another Sangamon County resident testified that “Lincoln would start for his office in the morning and she’d go to the door and holler: ‘Come back here now and dress those children or they won’t be tended today. I’m not going to break my back dressing up those children while you loaf at the office talking politics all the day.’”⁸⁹ In 1860, a visitor to the Lincoln home heard her cry out: “Abraham! Abraham! come and put this child to bed!”⁹⁰

Mary Lincoln continued to find herself overwhelmed by the demands of motherhood as her family grew with the birth of three more sons (Edward in 1846; William in 1850; and Thomas, better known as Tad, in 1853). Her cousin, Elizabeth Todd Grimsley, recalled that Mary was “always over-anxious and worried about the boys and withal was not a skillful nurse” and “was totally unfitted for caring for them” when they became sick.⁹¹ If anything untoward happened to her children, she became hysterical. One day in 1844, she overreacted to the illness of young Robert and sent the maid to fetch a doctor. Apparently believing that there was little wrong, the servant paused to chat

⁸⁸ “Anecdotes of Mrs. Lincoln,” by “a neighbor of the family at the time of President Lincoln’s funeral,” quoted in The News (no city indicated), ca. 17 July 1882, unidentified clipping, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

⁸⁹ Mrs. Sina Wilbourn, interviewed by Bond P. Geddes, Omaha Daily News, 24 January 1909. In 1842, Illinois-born Sina Henderson wed Robert W. Wilbourn in Sangamon County. Illinois Statewide Marriage Index, 1763-1900, Illinois State Archives, Springfield. According to the 1850 census, she was twenty-nine years old in that year; her husband, a farmer born in Kentucky, was thirty-eight. She alleged that her husband knew Lincoln in New Salem and hired him, when he was just starting out as a lawyer, to defend against a prominent family who brought suit against him for allegedly stealing a pig. Lincoln, she said, won the case. Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 12 February 1909. No record survives of Robert W. Wilbourn’s suit, though Lincoln and John Todd Stuart did represent Thomas Wilbourn and John S. Wilbourn, who in October 1837 sued Pollard Simmons for failure to pay a debt. See T. and J. S. Wilbourn vs. Simmons, LPAL, case file # 04655. I am grateful to Dr. Wayne C. Temple, Chief Deputy Director of the Illinois State Archives, and Professor Kenneth J. Winkle of the University of Nebraska for information about Mrs. Wilbourn.

⁹⁰ Boston Courier, n.d., quoted in the Campaign Atlas and Bee (Boston), 1 September 1860.

⁹¹ Elizabeth Todd Grimsley, “Six Months in the White House,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 19 (1926-27): 54.

with a friend. When Mrs. Lincoln observed this dawdling, she shouted, “Charity! Charity! run for your life and I’ll give you fifty dollars when you get back.”⁹² Mrs. Lincoln’s hysterics disturbed the peace in that normally quiet neighborhood. Mrs. Frederick S. Dean, who lived across the street from the Lincoln home, took pity on the distracted newcomer and gently quieted her down.⁹³

Another neighbor, Elizabeth Lushbaugh Capps, described Mary Lincoln as “a very nervous, hysterical woman who was incessantly alarming the neighborhood with her outcries. It was a common thing to see her standing out on their terrace in front of the house, waving her arms and screaming, ‘Bobbie’s lost! Bobbie’s lost!’ when perhaps he was just over in our house. This was almost an every day occurrence.” Mrs. Capps recalled a time “when Robert could just barely walk Mrs. Lincoln came out in front as usual, screaming, ‘Bobbie will die! Bobbie will die!’ My father ran over to see what had happened. Bobbie was found sitting out near the back door by a lime box and had a little lime in his mouth. Father took him, washed his mouth out and that’s all there was to it.” Mary Lincoln’s frequent outbursts so frightened the neighborhood children that they feared her; so rather than playing with Bob at his house, they would invite him to their homes.⁹⁴

Lincoln grew so accustomed to his wife’s alarmist cries of distress that he sometimes ignored them. One summer day on the courthouse square, while he was

⁹² Elizabeth Lushbaugh Capps, “Early Recollections of Abraham Lincoln,” reference files of the Abraham Lincoln Association, “Reminiscences,” folder 1, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁹³ Fred I. Dean to Ida M. Tarbell, Washington, 7 January 1900, Tarbell Papers, Smith College.

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Lushbaugh Capps, “Early Recollections of Abraham Lincoln,” reference files of the Abraham Lincoln Association, “Reminiscences,” folder 1, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield; Elizabeth Capps, interview with Hannah Hinsdale, clipping dated Yakima, Washington, 2 February [1929?], Lincoln Shrine, A. K. Smiley Library, Redlands, California.

regaling friends with a story, young Robert rushed up exclaiming that Mrs. Lincoln insisted that he come home and rescue young Tad, who had fallen into the cistern. To the surprise of his cronies, Lincoln refused, noting that Tad had done this before.⁹⁵

The appearance and location of the Lincoln's house at Eighth and Jackson Streets, according to one historian, denoted "aristocracy" and "wealth and social position."⁹⁶ Not all observers, however, found it imposing. In 1860, visitors from Philadelphia called it "neat," "clean, cosy and tidy-looking," "singularly quiet-looking," with "no sign of pretension anywhere visible," and "just such a home as a sensible man in one of our sensible Pennsylvania towns would care to enjoy."⁹⁷ New York callers agreed, deeming the house "unpretending," "modest-looking," "very plain," "not pretentious," "just such a dwelling as a majority of the well-to-do residents of these fine western towns occupy," "the residence of an American gentleman in easy circumstances," a man who was "neither poor nor rich."⁹⁸ In November 1860, its appearance was marred by "a broken

⁹⁵ This story was told by Democratic Congressman James Carroll Robinson (1823-1886), who was born in Edgar County and moved to Clark County, where he practiced law from about 1850 to 1869, when he moved to Springfield. John M. Palmer, ed., The Bench and Bar of Illinois (2 vols.; Chicago: Lewis, 1899), 1:202-3. He knew Lincoln well. He passed this story on to his granddaughter, Lulu R. Robinson, who recounted it in "Childhood and Girlhood Recollections about Lincoln," an undated manuscript, written ca. 1950, Lincoln Papers, Indiana University.

⁹⁶ Archibald L. Bowen maintained that "Abraham Lincoln lived in Springfield when a story and a half, white frame house with green shutters was a sign of aristocracy, of wealth and social position. Lincoln's home was a story and a half, white frame house with green shutters. It was located on the outskirts, where aristocracy of wealth and social position is wont to build. About him lived the prosperous and the leading families of the community." Bowen, "A. Lincoln: His House," 17.

⁹⁷ Springfield correspondence by W., 14 November, Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, 21 November 1860; Springfield correspondence by J. L., August 1860 [no day of the month indicated], Philadelphia North American and United States Gazette, 22 August 1860.

⁹⁸ Springfield correspondence, 21 June, Utica Herald, 27 June 1860, copied in the New York Tribune, 9 July 1860; [George Opdyke], undated letter, New York Evening Post, 23 May 1860; Springfield correspondence, 8 August, New York Herald, 13 August 1860; Theodore Tilton to Elizabeth R. Tilton, Bloomington, Illinois, 5 January 1865, in Wayne C. Temple, ed., "Lincoln's Springfield Home in 1865," Lincoln Herald 60 (1958): 16; Springfield correspondence by Charles A. Page, 4 May 1865, in Charles A. Page, Letters of a War Correspondent, ed. James R. Gilmore (Boston: L. C. Page, 1899), 388; Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, 17 November 1860.

pane of glass on each side of [the] front door, & two or three broken blinds on the side.”⁹⁹

(Illinois Congressman William A. Richardson said of Lincoln that it “was notorious that his fences were always in need of repair, his gate wanted a hinge, the grass in his yard needed cutting, and the scene around his home betrayed a reckless indifference to appearances.”)¹⁰⁰ When Congressman George Ashmun called at the house in 1860, he noted that its furniture, “without pretension to show, was neat, and in admirable keeping with what is understood to be his moderate pecuniary ability. Everything tended to represent the home of a man who has battled hard with the fortunes of life, and whose hard experience has taught him to enjoy whatever of success belongs to him, rather in solid substance than in showy display.”¹⁰¹ Others noted that the house was “furnished in the style usual in well-to-do educated families,” with “strong, well-made furniture” designed “for use and not for show.”¹⁰²

In 1856, Mary Lincoln had the upstairs of the house converted into a full second story.¹⁰³ The alteration was undertaken while Lincoln, who opposed any such expansion, was on the circuit.¹⁰⁴ He allegedly had conspired with local carpenters to have an inflated estimate of the cost prepared so that he could reasonably claim that it was too

⁹⁹ Benjamin F. Seaver to Lucy Seaver, Springfield, 17 November 1860, in Joseph Lyle McCorison, Jr., ed., “Mr. Lincoln’s Broken Blinds,” Lincoln Herald 50 (1948): 45.

¹⁰⁰ Richardson quoted by William R. Morrison, in the reminiscences of Secretary of Agriculture J. Sterling Morton of Nebraska, in an undated article by Alfred Henry Lewis, copied from Human Life, June [no year given], clipping collection, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana. This reminiscence dates from 1895.

¹⁰¹ Springfield, Illinois, correspondence, 19 May, Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican, 23 May 1860.

¹⁰² Springfield correspondence, 4 September, New York Evening Post, 8 September 1860; Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, 17 November 1860.

¹⁰³ Temple, By Square & Compass, 89-111.

¹⁰⁴ Caroline Dall, “The West – II,” Springfield correspondence, 31 October 1866, unidentified clipping, Dall Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society. Dall said “Lincoln resisted all attempts at its enlargement.” Her informant was probably William H. Herndon.

expensive.¹⁰⁵ The contractors hired by Mrs. Lincoln agreed to complete the work in the few weeks that he would be absent. Upon his return, he pretended not to recognize his domicile, now that it was a storey taller and adorned with what he called “gingerbread.”¹⁰⁶ So he asked a neighbor, Abner Wilkinson, “Wilkie can you tell me where old Abe Lincoln lived around these parts?”¹⁰⁷ The neighbors, anxious to see how Lincoln would react, observed his conduct with amusement. His wife, however, was not amused. “Come in, you old fool,” she ordered. “Don’t you know your own house when you see it?”¹⁰⁸ After scolding her “for running him in debt,” Lincoln teased: “Well, Mary, you remind me of the story of the fellow who went to California and left one baby at home and when he returned three years later, found three. The fellow looked at his wife and then at the children and said, ‘Well, Lizzie, for a little woman and without help, you have raised thunder amazingly.’”¹⁰⁹ (Mary Lincoln may have paid for the improvements

¹⁰⁵ A. L. Bowen, “Lincoln’s Character Revealed in the Purchase of His House,” Christian Science Monitor, 12 February 1926. Lincoln allegedly colluded with the carpenter John Armstrong and another named Connelly.

¹⁰⁶ “President Lincoln’s Old Home,” unidentified clipping, Otto Eisenschiml Scrapbooks, University of Iowa.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with John A. Sylvester, Sangamo Monitor (Springfield), 5 April 1893, in Temple, By Square & Compass, 274-75. Sylvester was a workman who helped add the second storey to the house in 1856. Wilkinson lived directly across the street from the Lincoln house.

¹⁰⁸ Reminiscences of Mrs. John S. Bradford, recorded in Eugenia Jones Hunt, “When Mrs. Abe Called Lincoln ‘You Old Fool,’” Chicago Tribune, 8 February 1931. Mrs. Hunt, whose father was Albert Jones, a friend and colleague of Lincoln at the bar, commented sarcastically: “Mrs. Lincoln, we knew, was cultured and used choice diction.” See also Eugenia Jones Hunt, My Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd Lincoln, ed. Helen A. Moser (Peoria, Illinois: Helen A. Moser, 1966), 26. Shortly after Lincoln’s death, James Gourley told William Herndon a similar story. Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 452. See also Temple, By Square and Compass, 41.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with John A. Sylvester, Sangamo Monitor (Springfield), 5 April 1893, in Temple, By Square & Compass, 275; James Gourley, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 452.

herself; two years earlier she had sold an 80-acre lot that her father had left her and realized a profit of \$1200. The expansion cost \$1300.)¹¹⁰

Some residents of Springfield were puzzled by this remodeling job. Mrs. John Todd Stuart told her daughter, “Lincoln has commenced raising his back building two stories high. I think they will have room enough before they are done, particularly as Mary seldom ever uses what she has.”¹¹¹ (Mrs. Stuart did not like Mary Lincoln, and when asked to talk about her, refused, simply saying: “Oh, she was a Todd.”)¹¹² In fact, the expansion added so much space that the Lincolns took in a boarder, Stephen Smith, the brother of Mary’s brother-in-law, Clark M. Smith. He slept at the Lincoln home but ate elsewhere.¹¹³ According to the woman whom Stephen Smith later married, the Lincolns took in a boarder “because Mr. Lincoln, riding the circuit at that time, was away from home a great deal and Mrs. Lincoln was afraid to be alone.”¹¹⁴

Mary Lincoln decided on the addition soon after a successful tailor acquired an impressive house in their neighborhood; she was displeased that a mere tailor should have a more handsome residence than one of the city’s more eminent lawyers.¹¹⁵ John E. Roll, who had helped remodel the house in 1849, reported that “Mrs. Lincoln decided their means justified a more pretentious house.”¹¹⁶ In the 1840s, a house with a two-

¹¹⁰ Temple, By Square & Compass, 272-73.

¹¹¹ Mrs. John Todd Stuart to her daughter Bettie, [Springfield], 3 April [1856], Stuart-Hay Family Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

¹¹² Mrs. Stuart quoted by Elliott Danforth in 1901, Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 10 February 1901, p. 19.

¹¹³ Temple, By Square & Compass, 65.

¹¹⁴ Elizabeth Irons Folsom, “New Stories of Abraham Lincoln,” The American Magazine, July 1923, 47.

¹¹⁵ An old resident of Springfield, quoted in an unidentified clipping, annotated with the date 12 February 1897, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana. Abner Wilkinson, a tailor, lived across the street from the Lincolns. Interview with John A. Sylvester, Sangamo Monitor (Springfield), 5 April 1893, in Temple, By Square & Compass, 274.

¹¹⁶ Reminiscences of John E. Roll, Chicago Tribune, 12 February 1900.

storey back was a status symbol that she “was consumed with a desire” to have.¹¹⁷ The alteration did make the house “superior in appearance to those in the immediate vicinity,” for it now rose “considerably above the level of the street” and dwarfed “by its great height and size, the adjoining dwellings.”¹¹⁸ Mary Lincoln’s nephew termed it “one of the more pretentious residences of Springfield.”¹¹⁹ A New York visitor disagreed, judging that its “appearance is more modest than many houses in its vicinity. Beside the Governor’s mansion, and the gaudy palace of the notorious ex-Governor [Joel] Matteson, it is as a keeper’s cottage or a porter’s lodge.”¹²⁰ In 1866, a Virginian “was surprised to see such a plain house, and not in the best part of the city at that.”¹²¹ An architectural historian classified the house as “purely transitional,” blending “both the Greek Revival and the succeeding Parvenu” styles.¹²²

Though nearly every house in Springfield was landscaped carefully, with trees, shrubbery, and neat flower gardens, the Lincolns did little to improve the appearance of

¹¹⁷ The assistant superintendent of Springfield’s schools, Jacob C. Thompson, reported this. Article by Louis J. Humphrey, dated Springfield, 12 February, unidentified clipping, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

¹¹⁸ Springfield correspondence, 3 November, New York World, n.d., copied in the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, 8 November 1860; dispatch by [Henry J.] R[aymond], Auburn, New York, 22 May, New York Times, 24 May 1860.

¹¹⁹ Albert Stevenson Edwards, “The Lincoln Home,” Blue Book of the State of Illinois, ed. James A. Rose (Springfield: Phillips Bros., 1908), 510. Archibald L. Bowen asserted that it “was a pretentious house for the day. It compared favorably with any in the little city and gave him cause for pride that he could give to his children to much more than he had had in boyhood and youth. . . . His self respect and sense of personal dignity must have been enhanced immeasurably the very day he moved into this house with his wife and son.” Bowen, “A. Lincoln: His House,” 70-71.

¹²⁰ Springfield correspondence [by Richard J. McCormick], 28 January, New York Evening Post, 1 February 1861.

¹²¹ George A. Armes, Ups and Downs of an Army Officer (Washington: n.p., 1900), 160 (diary entry dated Springfield, 16 June 1866).

¹²² Thomas E. Talmadge to Paul M. Angle, Chicago, 9 September 1930, Abraham Lincoln Association Research Files, folder “Home (Springfield),” Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

their yard.¹²³ Frances Todd Wallace said that neither her sister nor her brother-in-law “loved the beautiful – I have planted flowers in their front yard myself to hide nakedness – ugliness &c. &c. have done it often – and often – Mrs L never planted trees – Roses – never made a garden, at least not more than once or twice.”¹²⁴ James Gourley, who lived next door to the Lincolns for many years, remembered that “Lincoln was a poor landscape gardener and his yard was graced by very little shrubbery. He once decided to plant some rosebushes in the yard, and called my attention to them, but in a short time he had forgotten all about them.” Lincoln, Gourley added, “never planted any vines or trees of any kind; in fact seemed to take little, if any, interest in things of that kind. Finally, however, yielding to my oft-repeated suggestion, he undertook to cultivate a garden in the yard in back of his house; but one season’s experience in caring for his flowers and vegetables sufficed to cure him of all desire for another.”¹²⁵ The house’s bare appearance moved one observer to criticize its “almost unbecoming absence of taste and refinement.”¹²⁶

Lincoln avoided this house as much as possible, because “his home was Hell” and “absence from home was his Heaven,” according to William Herndon.¹²⁷ Each spring and fall, he spent an unusually long time on the legal circuit. So much did he enjoy life on the circuit that he rejected a job offer from a Chicago firm, even though it paid much

¹²³ New York Herald, 13 August 1860; 1860 photograph by John Adams Whipple, reproduced in Philip B. Kunhardt, Jr. et al., Lincoln: An Illustrated Biography (New York: Knopf, 1992), 68-69.

¹²⁴ Frances Todd Wallace, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 486.

¹²⁵ Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 120-21.

¹²⁶ Springfield correspondence, 11 June, New York Herald, 26 June 1860.

¹²⁷ Herndon to Isaac N. Arnold, Springfield, 24 October [18]83, Lincoln Collection, Chicago History Museum.

more than he could earn in Springfield.¹²⁸ Rather than return home on weekends like the other circuit riders, he stayed over in the little county seats by himself, even though, as one of them put it, “nothing could be duller than remaining on the Sabbath in a country inn of that time after adjournment of court. Good cheer had expended its force during court week, and blank dullness succeeded; but Lincoln would entertain the few lingering roustabouts of the barroom with as great zest, apparently, as he had previously entertained the court and bar, and then would hitch up his horse . . . and, solitary and alone, ride off to the next term in course.”¹²⁹ David Davis and the other attorneys “soon learned to account for his strange disinclination to go home.” Lincoln “never had much to say about home, and,” Davis recalled, “we never felt free to comment on it. Most of us had pleasant, inviting homes, and as we struck out for them I’m sure each one of us down in our hearts had a mingled feeling of pity and sympathy for him.”¹³⁰ To Davis and others it was obvious that Lincoln “was not domestically happy.”¹³¹ Herndon remembered that “while all other lawyers, every Saturday night after court hours, would start for home to see wife & babies,” Lincoln “would see us start home and know that we were bound to see good wife and the children. Lincoln, poor soul, would grow terribly sad at the sight, as much as to say – ‘I have no wife and no home.’ None of us on starting home would

¹²⁸ Around 1848, Grant Goodrich of Chicago encouraged Lincoln to become his partner. Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 193n.; Goodrich to Herndon, Chicago, 9 December 1866, ibid., 509-12.

¹²⁹ Henry C. Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, vol. 1 of A Life of Lincoln, ed. Marion Mills Miller (2 vols.; New York: Baker & Taylor, 1908), 189.

¹³⁰ Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 257.

¹³¹ Davis interview with Herndon, 20 September 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 349. See also Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 90.

say to Lincoln – ‘Come, Lincoln, let’s go home,’ for we knew the terrors of home to him.”¹³²

Even when in Springfield, Lincoln usually spent hours each Sunday away from his wife. Milton Hay, who was often in the Lincoln-Herndon office, recalled that “year after year,” Lincoln on Sabbath mornings “would leave his home and walk along the streets with his hands folded behind him” and upon arriving at his office, “would take off his coat and stretch out on a lounge.” After looking at the ceiling for a long while, he would rise “and look around in some books or papers, or write a letter or two. Then he’d put on his coat and hat and walk home in time for his dinner.”¹³³

In addition to being the only lawyer on the circuit to avoid his home on the weekends, Lincoln was one of the few who attended every court and who remained on the circuit throughout the term.¹³⁴ John M. Scott recalled that after 1854, “there was no such thing in central Illinois as ‘traveling the circuit’ as was done in earlier days. Mr. Lincoln was probably the last one to give it up in the ‘old 8th Circuit.’”¹³⁵ In 1860, Leonard Swett asserted that “for perhaps five years Lincoln and myself have been the only ones [i.e., lawyers] who have habitually passed over the whole circuit.”¹³⁶

¹³² Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 24 February 1887, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

¹³³ Carl Sandburg’s notes of an interview with Joseph Fifer, [1923], Sandburg-Barrett Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago.

¹³⁴ Herndon to Isaac N. Arnold, Springfield, 24 October [18]83, Lincoln Collection, Chicago History Museum; reminiscences of Judge Lawrence Weldon, Springfield News, 12 February 1902; John M. Palmer, Personal Recollections of John M. Palmer: The Story of an Earnest Life (Cincinnati: R. Clarke, 1901), 40; Henry C. Whitney, Life on the Circuit with Lincoln, ed. Paul M. Angle (1892; Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton, 1940), 62; Willard L. King, Lincoln’s Manager: David Davis (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 87.

¹³⁵ [John M. Scott], “Lincoln on the Stump and at the Bar,” typescript, p. 9, Ida M. Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

¹³⁶ Leonard Swett to Josiah H. Drummond, 27 May 1860, Portland, Maine, Evening Express, n.d., copied in the New York Sun, 26 July 1891. Swett said that in addition to Lincoln and himself, only Ward Hill Lamon

Unlike David Davis, Richard Yates, and other attorneys and politicians who wrote home regularly, Lincoln seldom corresponded with his wife.¹³⁷ (Herndon said his partner “hated” to write letters.)¹³⁸ In 1850, Davis reported that Lincoln had not received word from Mary since he left Springfield seven weeks earlier.¹³⁹ Two years thereafter, Davis said that Lincoln, while on the circuit, had not heard from home in six weeks.¹⁴⁰ Adeline Rossiter Judd (wife of Norman B. Judd) once asked Lincoln, then traveling the circuit, about his spouse. When he replied that he had received no word from her since he had

and David Davis attended all sessions on the circuit. Swett, lecture on Lincoln, Chicago Times, 21 February 1876.

¹³⁷ Only a few letters survive. There may have been more, for Robert Todd Lincoln destroyed some family correspondence. In 1913, he acknowledged that hundreds of letters shedding light on “the distressing mental disorder of my mother” had “been kindly sent me for destruction and I am quite sure that there exist still other hundreds. All that I have known of are of the same tenor; many have been printed in newspapers and catalogues; and I long ago came to the conclusion that one could not imagine a more hopeless work than an effort to collect them or even a large fraction of them.” Robert Todd Lincoln to Le Grant Van Valkenburgh, Manchester, Vermont, 26 May 1913, Robert Todd Lincoln Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Carl Sandburg heard the Springfield manuscript dealer H. E. Barker “say that Robert Lincoln sought the letters of his mother for the purpose of destroying them.” Barker apparently had a standing order to acquire her letters and sell them to Robert. Sandburg thought Barker “a well contained person” who seemed “credible.” When he told Sandburg this story, Barker “was making no special point and he mentioned the matter in connection with a letter or two of Mrs. Lincoln that he had on sale and the fact that Robert Lincoln had by purchase and destruction diminished the number of available letters of Mrs. Lincoln.” Sandburg to David Mearns, Flat Rock, N.C., 27 June 1947, Mearns Papers, Library of Congress. Mrs. John Todd Stuart reported that her husband “had been requested by Robert Todd Lincoln to destroy all family and confidential or business letters, appertaining to either Mr. or Mrs. Lincoln.” Emily Huntington Stuart, “Some Recollections of the Early Days of Springfield and Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln and Other Celebrities who Lived in that Little Town in My Youth,” typescript bound in *Daughters of the American Revolution, State of Illinois, Genealogical Records, 1940-41*, 3:118, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Jesse W. Weik “discovered a lot of Mrs. Lincoln’s letters in Washington, but incautiously told Nicolay, who told Robert Lincoln, and the letters were bought and disappeared.” Beveridge told this to William E. Barton. Barton to a Mr. Bradford, n.p., 31 May 1924, copy, Barton Papers, University of Chicago. See Thomas F. Schwartz, “Roasting Lincoln’s Letters: What Did Robert T. Lincoln Burn?” Lincoln Newsletter 9 (fall 1990): 4-5, and James T. Hickey, “Robert Todd Lincoln and the ‘Purely Private’ Letters of the Lincoln Family,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 74 (1981): 59-79.

¹³⁸ “You say it is harder to get one of Mr Lincoln’s autographs than Washington’s. Washington loved to write. Lincoln hated to do so.” Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 7 December 1875, Lincoln Collection, Brown University.

¹³⁹ Davis to his wife, Shelbyville, 20 May 1850, David Davis Papers, Chicago History Museum.

¹⁴⁰ Davis to his wife, Shelbyville, 17, 20 May 1852, in King, David Davis, 84.

started out three weeks earlier, Mrs. Judd asked rhetorically: “But Mr. Lincoln, aren’t you married?”

“No, no,” he protested, “if there was anything the matter Mary would write.”

Mrs. Judd, who received letters from her husband every day when they were separated, was dumbfounded.¹⁴¹

The tone of the few surviving letters between the Lincolns is cool compared with the loving warmth expressed by other couples in their circle, like the Judds, the Lyman Trumbulls, the David Davises, the Jesse W. Fells, the Richard Yateses, the John M. Palmers, the Stephen T. Logans, the Joseph Duncans, the Orville H. Brownings, and the John Todd Stuarts.¹⁴² In 1857, Trumbull, who wrote to his beloved spouse every other day when they were apart, told her: “Some husbands care but little for their wives & of course are not troubled if they do not hear from them frequently, but such is not my case.”¹⁴³ Five years earlier, Palmer told his mate: “Men are charged with indifference to their wives and perhaps it is true of many but I declare to you that all my thoughts and feelings and love is far more ardent towards you than they were on the night when I first called you my own dear wife.”¹⁴⁴ That same year, Richard Yates told his wife: “Caty I

¹⁴¹ Mrs. Norman B. Judd, undated interview with Ida Tarbell, Ida M. Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

¹⁴² Lincoln’s four surviving letters to his wife dating from his term in Congress lack warmth. As John T. Morse observed, they “seem to indicate a little indifference in their general tone. In only one does he seem really to miss her companionship.” Morse to Albert J. Beveridge, Boston, 12 August 1925, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress. Other contemporaries were far more loving in their correspondence than the Lincolns. See, for example, Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond, eds., Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimke Weld, and Sarah Grimke, 1822-1844 (2 vols.; Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, 1934).

¹⁴³ Lyman Trumbull to Julia Jayne Trumbull, Alton, Illinois, 17 October 1857, Trumbull Family Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

¹⁴⁴ Palmer to his wife, Carrollton, Illinois, 16 April 1852, Palmer Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

am desperately in love with you.”¹⁴⁵ When separated from his “Dearest Eliza,” Orville H. Browning wrote her twice weekly. In 1844, he declared to her: “oh, how I wish you were with me. . . . No man on earth owes more to the devotion of a wife, and I hope God will give me the means to repay it in kindness and affection.”¹⁴⁶ When on the circuit, he sent her letters containing what she called “Such beautiful poetry, Such Sighing, and Loveing, dearing, and all that kind of thing.”¹⁴⁷ Writing from Washington in 1841, Jesse W. Fell exclaimed to his wife: “How often, and with what absorbing interest have I thought of thee, since we parted. How frequently have I wandered in imagination to the ‘Far,’ ‘far West,’ and then fancied myself one of a little group, with my wife and boy by my side How often, and how fondly have I wished that my person could keep pace with my imagination, that I could again behold you, that I could once more be surrounded by those objects, the nearest and dearest in life, my wife and boy.”¹⁴⁸ In 1860, David Davis assured his spouse that “All the honors of the world pale before my undying love for you.”¹⁴⁹ Nothing of this sort appears in Lincoln’s letters to his wife.

Early in his marriage, Lincoln began staying away from home. In the first year, when Mary was pregnant, he was gone nearly ten weeks. (David Davis’s wife “was a

¹⁴⁵ Yates to his wife, Washington, 1 January 1852, Richard Yates and Catharine Yates Pickering, Richard Yates: Civil War Governor, ed. John H. Krenkel (Danville, Illinois: Interstate Printers, 1966), 77. Cf. same to same, Washington, 25 January and 17 July 1852, 18 and 19 December 1853, ibid., 79, 83, 88-90.

¹⁴⁶ Browning to Eliza Caldwell Browning, Lower Blue Licks, Kentucky, 24 July 1844, Ricks Collection, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. See also Maurice G. Baxter, Orville H. Browning: Lincoln’s Friend and Critic (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1957), 12-13, 52-53.

¹⁴⁷ Eliza Browning to Ann Browning, 9 October 1838, in Baxter, Browning, 13.

¹⁴⁸ Jesse W. Fell to Hester V. Fell, Washington, 22 June 1841, Fell Papers, Library of Congress. Writing from New York eleven years later, he told her: “How often have I realized since I left home how desolate I was without you. How frequently when wrapt in the contemplation of some beautiful scene have I exclaimed, ‘Oh! If Hester and our little ones were here how happy I should be!’” Letter of 26 September 1852, ibid.

¹⁴⁹ David Davis to Sarah Walker Davis, Clinton, Illinois, 12 October 1860, Davis Papers, Chicago History Museum.

little critical of Lincoln, whom she adored, for staying out on the circuit when Mary was expecting.”¹⁵⁰ Although he suffered from homesickness while on the circuit in early 1843,¹⁵¹ as the years went by he remained away more and more until finally he was absent from Springfield more than four months a year.¹⁵² In 1854, David Davis said that “Mr. Lincoln is so much engaged here [on the circuit] that he will not find time to go home – so that before he gets home again he will have been absent six (6) weeks.”¹⁵³ Robert Todd Lincoln recalled that during his childhood and early youth, his father “was almost constantly away from home.”¹⁵⁴ In 1858, Lincoln wrote that “I am [away] from home perhaps more than half my time.”¹⁵⁵ Two years later, a Springfield minister informed a colleague that Lincoln was frequently absent on the Sabbath because “for the last 3 or 4 years he has been away from home much of the time and engaged in very exhausting labors.”¹⁵⁶ When not on the road, Lincoln rarely passed the evening at his

¹⁵⁰ Willard L. King to Ruth Painter Randall, Chicago, 21 September 1953, J. G. Randall Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁵¹ In the spring of 1843, in the northern part of the Eighth Judicial Circuit, James C. Conkling found Lincoln “desperately homesick and turning his head frequently towards the south.” Conkling to Mercy Levering Conkling, Bloomington, 18 [and 19] April 1843, Conkling Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

¹⁵² Charles B. Strozier, Lincoln’s Quest for Union: Public and Private Meanings (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 116-20. Strozier contends that Lincoln stayed away longer and longer as time passed, especially after the early 1850s. But his source, Lincoln Day by Day: A Chronology, 1809-1865, ed. Earl Schenck Miers et al. (3 vols.; Washington, D.C.: Lincoln Sesquicentennial Commission, 1960), does not support such a conclusion. The title of that estimable work is misleading, for the book does not indicate where Lincoln was every single day, yet it does suggest that he spent more time at home in the mid and late 1850s than in the early years of that decade. See also Richard Friend Lufkin’s series of articles, “Mr. Lincoln’s Light from under a Bushel,” Lincoln Herald 52 (1950): 2-20; 53 (1951): 2-25; 54 (1952): 2-26; 55 (1953): 2-14; 56 (1954): 3-24.

¹⁵³ Davis to his wife, Pekin, 8 May 1854, in King, David Davis, 94.

¹⁵⁴ Robert Todd Lincoln to J. G. Holland, Chicago, 6 June 1865, Robert Todd Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁵⁵ Lincoln to Samuel Caldwell, Springfield, 27 May 1858, Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln: Second Supplement, 1848-1865, ed. Roy P. Basler and Christian O. Basler (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 14.

¹⁵⁶ The Rev. Mr. Albert Hale to the Rev. Mr. Theron Baldwin, Springfield, 31 May 1860, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 95.

house. According to Herndon, he frequently left home between seven and eight A.M. and returned at midnight or even later.¹⁵⁷

To a neighbor, Mrs. Lincoln complained “that if her husband had Staid at home as he ought to, that She could love him better.”¹⁵⁸ If their separations were painful to her, it is hard to understand why she regularly absented herself from Washington during Lincoln’s term in Congress (1847-1849) and during his presidency, when she left him for months at a time.¹⁵⁹

PRESIDENTIAL POLITICKING

In 1844, Lincoln campaigned with special enthusiasm for the Whig presidential standard bearer, Henry Clay, whom he said he “almost worshipped.”¹⁶⁰ Lincoln could easily identify with Clay, for, as he observed in 1852, the Kentucky statesman had – like Lincoln – been born to “undistinguished parents” in “an obscure district,” had only a “comparatively limited” formal education, and “added something to his education during the greater part of his whole life.” His ideology, as Lincoln interpreted it, reflected Lincoln’s own views. Clay’s eloquence, Lincoln thought, manifested itself not in “elegant arrangement of words and sentences” but rather (like Lincoln’s) in a “deeply earnest and impassioned tone, and manner, which can proceed only from great sincerity and a thorough conviction.” Like Lincoln, Clay believed that “the world’s best hope depended on the continued Union of these States.” Like Lincoln, Clay “loved his country partly

¹⁵⁷ Herndon to Jesse Weik, Springfield, 10 July 1888, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁵⁸ Statement of James Gourley, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 453.

¹⁵⁹ Wayne C. Temple, “Mary Todd Lincoln’s Travels,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 52 (1959): 180-94.

¹⁶⁰ Leonard Volk recalled that Lincoln in 1860 told him “that he ‘almost worshipped’” Clay. Wilson, ed., Intimate Memories of Lincoln, 243. David Davis said Lincoln “loved & adored” Clay. David Davis, interview with Herndon, 20 September 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 350.

because it was his own country, but mostly because it was a free country” and “burned with a zeal for its advancement, prosperity and glory, of human liberty, human right and human nature.” Like Lincoln, Clay “desired the prosperity of his countrymen partly because they were his countrymen, but chiefly to show to the world that freemen could be prosperous.” Like Lincoln, Clay was “in principle and feeling, opposed to slavery.”¹⁶¹ (Few other eulogists of Clay mentioned his antislavery views.)¹⁶²

Many Whigs entertained high hopes for Clay’s success, including a Baltimorean who in February reported that the “enthusiasm of 1840 is returning. The Whigs look forward to the approaching contest,” for they had faith in “the justness of their cause – and in its righteousness read their claim to certain success.”¹⁶³

During the 1844 campaign, Lincoln, like most other Whigs, concentrated on the tariff issue, while Democrats focused on expansionism in Texas and Oregon.¹⁶⁴ (In May, Lincoln did speak about Texas, endorsing the Whig argument “that Annexation at this time upon the terms agreed upon by John Tyler was altogether inexpedient.”)¹⁶⁵ The Tariff of 1842 – the chief accomplishment of the Whig-dominated Twenty-Seventh Congress – had been designed to restore prosperity, encourage foreign investment,

¹⁶¹ Eulogy on Clay, 6 July 1852, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:121, 123, 124, 130.

¹⁶² Mark E. Neely, Jr., “American Nationalism in the Image of Henry Clay: Abraham Lincoln’s Eulogy on Henry Clay in Context,” Register of the Kentucky Historical Society 73 (1975): 31-60.

¹⁶³ Beverly C. Sandrin to James B. Clay, 20 February 1844, T. J. Clay Papers, quoted in Michael Holt, The Rise and Fall of the Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 162.

¹⁶⁴ Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 176-207.

¹⁶⁵ Speech of 22 May 1844, in Springfield, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:337; Illinois State Register (Springfield), 24 May 1844; Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 168-73. Cf. “The Whig Party and the Twenty-Ninth Congress,” Illinois State Register (Springfield), 17 October 1845.

improve the balance of trade, and enhance government revenues. Because most of these goals had been achieved, Whigs decided to emphasize the tariff issue.¹⁶⁶

During the winter of 1843-44, Lincoln joined Edward D. Baker, Stephen T. Logan and John Todd Stuart, speaking nightly throughout Sangamon County.¹⁶⁷ Extensive campaigning was necessary to spread the Whig gospel, for, as David Davis explained to a relative in Massachusetts, Illinoisans “get their information by public speaking, and it is well that they do. Otherwise, they would have none, for newspaper taking is not a trait in Western character.”¹⁶⁸ Several times during the spring, Lincoln debated John Calhoun, the Democratic congressional nominee in the Seventh District. According to John Locke Scripps’s 1860 campaign biography of Lincoln, Calhoun “exerted himself as he never had done before. Not even Douglas, in his palmyest days, ever bore aloft the Democratic standard more gallantly, or brought more strength of intellect to the defense of its principles.”¹⁶⁹ Lincoln “often said that Calhoun was the ablest Democrat in the State” and “that Calhoun gave him more trouble in his debates than Douglas ever did, because he was more captivating in his manner and a more learned man than Douglas.”¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 166-68.

¹⁶⁷ William Butler to John J. Hardin, Springfield, 21 February 1844, and William H. Herndon to Hardin, Springfield, 12 February 1844, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum.

¹⁶⁸ David Davis to Julius Rockwell, Bloomington, Illinois, 14 May 1844, transcript, Rockwell Papers, Lenox Public Library, Lenox, Massachusetts.

¹⁶⁹ John Locke Scripps, Life of Abraham Lincoln, ed. Roy P. Basler and Lloyd Dunlap (1860; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961), 81-82.

¹⁷⁰ William Jayne, “Richard Yates’ Services to Illinois as War Governor,” Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society 7 (1902): 144; Herndon to Ward Hill Lamon, Springfield, 6 March 1870, Lamon Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California; Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 84. Herndon thought Calhoun “polite, affable, and an honest debater, never dodging any question. This made him a formidable antagonist in argumentative controversy.” According to Octavia Roberts, Lincoln declared that he would rather debate Stephen A. Douglas than Calhoun, for “Douglas will equivocate and Calhoun will not.” Octavia Roberts, Lincoln in Illinois (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1919), 20-21.

In late March, Lincoln and Calhoun held a protracted debate at Springfield during which the former “proved conclusively that the English are now flooding this country with tracts & money to break down the present Whig tariff [of 1842].” Calhoun, who was fair and courteous, complained that the tariff “did not tax silk & wool high enough” and “that it was done to ‘benefit the rich to the injury of the poor man.’”¹⁷¹ James Gourley, who heard that debate, said “Calhoun was an able man – No mistake – one of the ablest men that ever made Stump Speeches in Ill[inoi]s – He came nearer of whipping Lincoln in debate than Douglas did.”¹⁷² John B. Weber, who also attended the debate in Springfield, marveled at the way “Lincoln used to stagger me with his tariff speeches: he so arranged his facts – his arguments – his logic that it approached me from such a peculiar angle that they struck me forcibly.”¹⁷³ In Tazewell County, where neither Whigs nor Democrats showed “extraordinary excitement,” the audience listened to the two men “calmly and quietly,” for they were “determined to decide this contest as they honestly believe it should be decided – upon the measures, acts and principles of the two parties.”¹⁷⁴ Not all witnesses agreed that the debates were conducted on a high level. In April, a Democratic observer said that Lincoln presented “all the stereotyped slanders

¹⁷¹ Anson G. Henry to John J. Hardin, Springfield, 25 March 1844, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum.

¹⁷² James Gourley, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 451-52. Turner R. King had a similar memory: “Calhoun & Lincoln discussed the tariff: they were the best debaters – most Logical & finest debates on the Tariff question in the State.” Turner R. King, interview with Herndon, McLain Station, Illinois, [1865-6], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 464.

¹⁷³ John B. Weber, interview with Herndon, Pawnee, Illinois, [ca. 1 November 1866], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 390, 388.

¹⁷⁴ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 19 April 1844.

upon Mr. Van Buren” which were “ably and successfully rebutted and exposed by Mr. Calhoun, in the course of the recent discussion.”¹⁷⁵

Milton Hay considered Calhoun “something of a factor” in Lincoln’s political education. During the 1830s and 1840s, Calhoun “was justly regarded as the strongest man intellectually in the Democratic ranks,” Hay observed. Though Calhoun lacked “the declamatory power of Douglas,” he excelled the Little Giant “in the clear statement of political issues and logical argument thereon.” Such “was Mr. Lincoln’s estimate of the two men.” Calhoun was especially talented at “colloquial street corner discussions,” just the sort of debate in which he and Lincoln often clashed. “Like Lincoln he could fairly state his opponents side of the question, and argue with fairness and preserve his temper.” Better educated than Lincoln, Calhoun had devoted himself single-mindedly to the study of politics. “Frequent contact and conflict with such an opponent must have had its educational influence on Mr Lincoln,” Hay speculated. “It habituated the sententious, precise and guarded statement of political propositions for which Mr Lincoln became so remarkable.”¹⁷⁶

In the spring and fall, Lincoln stumped Illinois, often with Calhoun as a sparring partner; when not debating face-to-face, one of them would speak and the other would do so the next day at the same location. Jesse W. Fell recalled that in “these elaborate speeches,” Lincoln “evinced a thorough mastery of the principles of political economy which underlie the tariff question, and presented arguments in favor of the protective policy with a power and conclusiveness rarely equaled, and at the same time in a manner

¹⁷⁵ Letter by “J. R. D.” Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 12 April 1844.

¹⁷⁶ Milton Hay to John Hay, Springfield, 8 February 1887, John Hay Papers, Brown University.

so lucid and familiar and so well interspersed with happy illustrations and apposite anecdotes, as to secure the delighted attention of his auditory.”¹⁷⁷

Contemporary press summaries of Lincoln’s oratory are sketchy, but some evidence suggests that Lincoln’s friend David Davis was not entirely unjustified in 1844 in calling him “the best Stump Speaker in the State.” (According to Davis, he “shows the want of early education but he has great powers as a speaker.”)¹⁷⁸ In February, he defended national and state banks in addition to the tariff.¹⁷⁹ On March 1, he tried to persuade farmers in Sugar Creek that a high protective tariff “made every thing they bought cheaper.”¹⁸⁰ In mid-March, he and Edward D. Baker debated Calhoun and Alfred W. Cavarly in Jacksonville.¹⁸¹ Later that month, at a debate with those two Democrats in Springfield, he “promised to forfeit his ‘ears’ and his ‘legs’ if he did not demonstrate, that protected articles have been cheaper since the late Tariff [of 1842] than before.”¹⁸² On April 6, he spoke for two hours to the Clay Club of Peoria; Calhoun replied a week later. After the Democratic leader’s four-hour speech, Lincoln reportedly “overwhelmed Calhoun and his friends by his argument, ridicule and good natured sarcasm.”¹⁸³

¹⁷⁷ Joseph J. Lewis, “Abraham Lincoln,” Chester County Times (Westchester, Pennsylvania), [11 February], reprinted in the Chicago Tribune, 23 February 1860. Jesse W. Fell was Lewis’s main informant. A strong admirer of Clay, Fell had taken an active part in the 1844 presidential campaign in Illinois. Lewis based his article on what Lincoln had written for Fell and what Fell told Lewis in order to supplement that document. Fell to James R. Doolittle, Bloomington, Illinois, 4 March 1873, reproduced in a pamphlet, “Autobiography of Abraham Lincoln,” p. 7, copy in the Fell Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁷⁸ David Davis to William P. Walker, Decatur, Illinois, 4 May 1844, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

¹⁷⁹ Speech at Virginia, Illinois, 23 February 1844, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:333.

¹⁸⁰ Speech of 1 March 1844, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:334.

¹⁸¹ Simeon Francis to John J. Hardin, Springfield, 17 March 1844, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum; Owen M. Long to Hardin, Jacksonville, 19 March 1844, ibid.

¹⁸² Debates with John Calhoun and Alfred W. Cavarly, 20-25 March 1844, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:334.

¹⁸³ Peoria Register, 14 April 1844; Peoria Democratic Press, 17 April 1844; [Thomas J. Pickett], “Anecdotes of Lincoln,” Rock Island, Illinois, Weekly Register, 30 May 1860.

In that city two months later, Lincoln addressed the Whig state convention, where he initially made a poor impression. He began his pro-tariff speech diffidently, fumbling for the right words and speaking in a tremulous voice. But as time passed, he grew more confident. He “straightened up, his countenance brightened, his language became free and animated, as, during this time he had illustrated his arguments by two or three well-told stories.” Eventually “he became eloquent, carrying the swaying crowd at his will” with his “closeness and soundness of logic,” his “numerous facts,” and his “elaborate and powerful arguments.”¹⁸⁴

That summer in Peoria, Lincoln debated the “turbulent, impetuous” Col. William L. May, who insisted that Lincoln not refer to May’s erratic political history. (He had been a Whig in his native Kentucky, switched to the Democratic party when he moved to Illinois, then resumed his Whig loyalty, only to return to the Democrats in 1844. President Jackson appointed him receiver of public moneys for the United States Land Office in Springfield; in 1841 he became mayor of that city.) Poking fun at the Whigs’ tall liberty pole, which had a decayed section that was replaced, May “ridiculed the whole concern,” declaring that “the pole was hollow at the butt end.” Lincoln replied that the hollow spot “was where the Col. had crawled out of the Whig party! He proposed to stop up the hole so that he couldn’t get back again!” The audience howled at the jest and laughed even harder when May “lost his temper” and “fell ‘to cursing like a very drab.’” May threatened to resort to the code duello, but calmed down when Lincoln apologized, “saying that he was in the predicament of the fellow who knocked his daddy down, and explained his ungracious conduct by the remark that the old man stood so fair he had to

¹⁸⁴ J[eriah] B[onham], “Recollections of Abraham Lincoln,” Chicago Tribune, 5 May 1895; Jeriah Bonham, Fifty Years’ Recollections (Peoria: J. W. Franks & Sons, 1883), 159-60.

hit him.”¹⁸⁵ In July, at a huge mass meeting in Vandalia, Lincoln again spoke on the tariff.¹⁸⁶

It is hard to know what facts and arguments Lincoln used in these debates and speeches, for neither the contemporary press accounts nor the recollections of witnesses provide them. As he later explained, it “was not fashionable here [in Illinois] in those days [the 1840s] to report one’s public speeches.”¹⁸⁷ But those accounts suggest that an article in the Sangamo Journal by one “Lancaster” may well have been written by Lincoln. The contention that protective tariffs unfairly burden “the poor farmer” was false, Lancaster argued, because the Whig high tariff of 1842 had raised duties, and all “manufactured articles were sold as low and many lower after [the enactment of the tariff] than they were before.” Manufacturers kept their prices down because more businesses were launched, for manufacturers “were encouraged to start their factories believing they could find a sale for their goods,” and the increased number of firms heightened competition, thus preventing “any extortion in prices.” Lancaster insisted that “These facts prove that our revenue is paid entirely by the foreign manufacturers; except perhaps occasionally some of our Fops and Dandies may be inclined to show off with a

¹⁸⁵ [Thomas J. Pickett], “Anecdotes of Lincoln,” Rock Island, Illinois, Weekly Register, 30 May 1860; Thomas J. Pickett’s recollections in the Lincoln, Nebraska, Daily State Journal, 12 April 1881, Wilson, ed., Intimate Memories of Lincoln, 190-91; Enoch P. Sloan to the editor, Peoria Daily Transcript, 21 April 1881; Jonathan K. Cooper to the same editor, ibid., 23 April 1881. On May, see Wayne C. Temple, “Mariah (Bartlett) Vance, Part 2” For the People: A Newsletter of the Abraham Lincoln Association 7 (2005): 1-2, 4-5.

¹⁸⁶ Sangamo Journal, 8 August 1844. Usher F. Linder recalled that at “a great mass meeting held in Vandalia in 1844,” Anthony Thornton, Lincoln and he “were appointed to address the vast multitudes from the stand, which had been erected on the east side of the old State House. . . . General Thornton was assigned to speak upon the subject of the currency, Lincoln upon the Tariff, and I to close, ranging thorough all the subjects then under discussion between the two great parties General Thornton’s speeches . . . seemed like reading from some great author, who knew all he was writing about. He was essentially instructive, furnishing facts and data for other speakers to elaborate further.” Linder, Reminiscences, 118.

¹⁸⁷ Lincoln to James E. Harvey, [Springfield], 2 October 1860, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:125.

London Coat, a Paris pair of boots, or ornament his table with a set of English knives and forks, or his parlour with an European carpet.” Echoing Lincoln’s 1843 Whig party circular, Lancaster noted that farmers and working men “do not indulge in those luxuries.” American manufacturers “can furnish an article good enough for us, and if our office holders want to ape the Paris or London fashions, and are willing to give their custom to the foreign manufacture, and pay the duty themselves, it is certainly democratic to grant them the liberty.” American manufacturers of broadcloth would benefit from a 35% tariff, but farmers would also benefit from that protection, for the manufacturers pay for wool and lard oil, which the farmers produce, and pay wages to workers, who spend three quarters of their income on goods produced by farmers. Lancaster concluded that an “examination into the business of cotton goods, boots, shoes, cordage, iron, lead, and in fact most all articles coming under the denomination of manufactures will exhibit the fact that nine tenths of all the protection goes indirectly into the pocket of the farmer.”¹⁸⁸

When the Democrats tried to capitalize on bloody anti-Catholic riots in Philadelphia, Lincoln and his fellow Whigs denied that there was any “hostility of the Whig party in general of foreigners and Catholics.” At a Springfield public meeting in June, the Whigs adopted resolutions, presented by Lincoln, condemning the riots and asserting that “in admitting the foreigner to the rights of citizenship, he should be put to some reasonable test of his fidelity to our country and institutions; and that he should first dwell among us a reasonable time to become generally acquainted with the nature of those institutions; and that, consistent with those requisites, naturalization laws, should be

¹⁸⁸ Sangamo Journal, 2 May 1844. On Lincoln’s “muddled” thinking about tariffs, see G. S. Boritt, Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1978), 103.

so framed, as to render admission to citizenship under them, as convenient, cheap, and expeditious as possible.” Moreover, “we will now, and at all times, oppose as best we may, all attempts to either destroy the naturalization laws or to so alter them, as to render admission under them, less convenient, less cheap, or less expeditious than it now is.” In addition, they resolved that “the guarantee of the rights of conscience, as found in our Constitution, is most sacred and inviolable, and one that belongs no less to the Catholic, than to the Protestant; and that all attempts to abridge or interfere with these rights, either of Catholic or Protestant, directly or indirectly, have our decided disapprobation, and shall ever have our most effective opposition.”¹⁸⁹

According to a Democratic newspaper, Lincoln at this meeting gave a speech in which he “expressed the kindest, and most benevolent feelings towards foreigners” and “alleged that the whigs were as much the friends of foreigners as democrats.” The paper chided him for “stating that the Catholics demanded the exclusion of the Bible from the public schools,” when in fact “all they wanted was the privilege . . . of introducing and using their own translation.”¹⁹⁰ Ebenezer Peck responded by calling a Democratic meeting at which, according to a Whig account, he “presented statements, declarations, and, as he said, quotations, which, the evening after were proved to be falsehoods and forgeries by Mr. Lincoln.”¹⁹¹ In the 1850s, Lincoln would once again denounce xenophobia and religious bigotry.

¹⁸⁹ Resolutions, 12 June 1844, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:337-38. Robert W. Johannsen stated that in 1844 Lincoln “was said to be one of the supporters of the nativist movement.” Robert W. Johannsen, Stephen A. Douglas (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 151. No evidence suggests that Lincoln in fact sympathized with or supported nativists. Indeed, surviving evidence indicates that he opposed them and their principles.

¹⁹⁰ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 21 June 1844, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:338.

¹⁹¹ Sangamo Journal, 4 July 1844.

By October, Lincoln was persuaded that his labors in Illinois “would be unavailing,” for in August the Democrats had won substantial majorities in the General Assembly, and the state’s Whig press conceded victory to the Democratic presidential nominee, James K. Polk.¹⁹² So Lincoln crossed the Wabash River and spoke several times in southwestern Indiana.¹⁹³ At Bruceville, Democrats disrupted his meeting, but nothing daunted, Lincoln waited for the uproar to subside, then finished his speech.¹⁹⁴ After hearing Lincoln’s address in Rockport, his former employer, William Jones, reported that his analysis of the tariff “shows he knows what he is talking about. He makes his arguments as plain as the nose on your face. You can’t miss the point. They are as outstanding as his jokes are funny.”¹⁹⁵ Another auditor, James C. Veatch, reported that Lincoln gave a “plain, argumentative” tariff speech that did “honor to himself and the whig cause.”¹⁹⁶ Later, Veatch recalled that the speaker’s “appearance was awkward, his voice high and squeaky, and he had none of that extreme dignity which clothed the State orators I had heard.” But soon Veatch “was struck by his manner of statement” as he

¹⁹² Lewis, “Lincoln,” 83; Sangamo Journal, 19 September 1844. The Democrats won eighty-three seats in the state House of Representatives and twenty-seven in the Senate; the Whigs won only thirty-eight in the former and fourteen in the latter. Sangamo Journal, 5 September 1844.

¹⁹³ Bess V. Ehrmann, Missing Chapter in the Life of Abraham Lincoln: A Number of Articles, Episodes, Photographs, Pen and Ink Sketches Concerning the Life of Abraham Lincoln in Spencer County, Indiana, between 1816–1830 and 1844 (Chicago: Walter M. Hill, 1938), 103-6; Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:341; Nathaniel Grigsby, interview with Herndon, Gentryville, Indiana, 12 September 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 114; James Kitchell to Harry E. Pratt, Vincennes, Indiana, 22 September 1938, reference files of the Abraham Lincoln Association, “Indiana” folder, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield; James F. Davis, “Abraham Lincoln Makes a Speech in Posey County,” typescript, O. V. Brown Papers, Indiana Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis; Vincennes (Indiana) Valley Advance, 11 February 1965; Indianapolis News, 26 February 1946.

¹⁹⁴ “Old Bruce House,” undated typescript, William Bruce Papers, Indiana Historical Library, Indianapolis. This is evidently a copy of a newspaper article that appeared in October 1927.

¹⁹⁵ Capt. John R. Dougherty, an employee of William Jones, told this in 1890 to George H. Honig. Honig, “Abe Lincoln and the Cosmic Ray,” p. 12, typescript dated 11 August 1947, Honig Papers, Willard Library, Evansville, Indiana.

¹⁹⁶ Rockport Herald, 1 November 1844, copied Grandview Monitor, 24 October 1934.

discussed the shopworn tariff issue, placing “things in a new light” so that “dry facts became interesting.” Veatch, who said it “the most remarkable speech that I had ever heard,” was to play a key role in helping Lincoln win the Republican nomination for president sixteen years later.¹⁹⁷

Lincoln’s effort on Clay’s behalf proved vain, for the Whig nominee received only 105 electoral votes to Polk’s 170; the popular vote for Polk was 1,338,464 (49.6%) and for Clay 1,300,097 (48.1%). In Illinois, where enthusiasm for the annexation of Texas and for the American claim to all of the Oregon Territory was especially strong, the expansionist Polk swamped Clay, 54% to 42%.¹⁹⁸ David Davis explained why some Illinoisans favored the annexation of Texas: “The old pioneers want it because they always want some place to drift to – lawyers want it because they think a great field for litigation will be opened, and law business is now at a low ebb in this state – and speculators want it because their business has been pretty much at a stand[still], in the State for a good long while, and they are tired of going backwards.”¹⁹⁹

Lincoln, who “was not only disappointed but disgusted,” regarded Clay’s defeat “as a great public calamity and a keen personal sorrow.”²⁰⁰ Other Illinois Whig leaders

¹⁹⁷ T. Hardy Masterson, “Lincoln’s Life in Indiana,” Rockport, Indiana, Journal, 12 February 1897. Masterson interviewed Veatch several months before his death. Masterson to George H. Honig, Kennett, Missouri, 22 November 1927, Southwestern Indiana Historical Society Papers, Willard Library, Evansville.

¹⁹⁸ Theodore Calvin Pease, ed., Illinois Election Returns, 1818-1848 (Springfield: Lincoln Presidential Library, 1923), 149. The Whigs traditionally did poorly in Illinois. In the gubernatorial elections of 1845 and 1848, they won only 37% and 33% respectively. Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 217.

¹⁹⁹ David Davis to Julius Rockwell, Bloomington, Illinois, 14 May 1844, transcript, Rockwell Papers, Lenox Public Library, Lenox, Massachusetts.

²⁰⁰ Josiah G. Holland, The Life of Abraham Lincoln (Springfield, Mass.: Gurdon Bill, 1866), 94; John G. Nicolay and John Hay, Abraham Lincoln: A History (10 vols.; New York: Century, 1890), 1:235. Hay wrote this section of the biography. Herndon claimed that Lincoln “took no more gloomy view of the situation than the rest of his party. He had been a leading figure himself in other campaigns, and was fully inured to the chilling blasts of defeat. They may have driven him in, but only for a short time.” Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 171.

reacted similarly to the triumph of Polk.²⁰¹ David Davis declared: “Clay’s defeat has weaned me from politics. I shall quit the Legislature and attend to my own private business. There is precious little use for any Whig in Illinois to be wasting his time and efforts. This State cannot be redeemed. I should as leave think of seeing one rise from the dead.”²⁰²

Along with many of his party colleagues, Lincoln blamed the outcome on New York antislavery Whigs who had voted for the Liberty Party candidate, James G. Birney, thus ensuring that Polk would carry the Empire State and, with it, the nation. (In New York, Birney received 15,814 votes, constituting 1.05% of the total; had one third of Birney’s votes gone to Clay, the Kentuckian would have won.) In 1845, Lincoln told a Liberty Party supporter that if the “whig abolitionists of New York had voted with us last fall, Mr. Clay would now be president, whig principles in the ascendent, and Texas not annexed; whereas by the division [of the Liberty and Whig forces], all that either had at stake in the contest, was lost.” An antislavery Whig had declared to Lincoln that he could not vote for the slaveholder Clay, because people of conscience “are not to do evil that good may come.” Plaintively Lincoln asked in reply: “If by your votes you could have prevented the extension, &c. of slavery, would it not have been good and not evil so to have used your votes, even though it involved the casting of them for a slaveholder? By the fruit the tree is to be known. An evil tree can not bring forth good fruit. If the fruit of

²⁰¹ See Joseph Gillespie to John J. Hardin, Edwardsville, 25 November 1844, and George T. M. Davis to Hardin, Alton, 24 November 1844, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum.

²⁰² David Davis to Julius Rockwell, Bloomington, Illinois, 17 December 1845, transcript, Rockwell Papers, Lenox Public Library, Lenox, Massachusetts.

electing Mr. Clay would have been to prevent the extension of slavery, could the act of electing have been evil?”²⁰³

Lincoln’s analysis, accurate as far as it went, was somewhat misleading. The antislavery Whigs of New York objected to Clay’s wavering on the annexation of Texas, which he had opposed in April; four months later he seemed to recant. His waffling probably cost him New York, but it may well have gained him Tennessee, where he prevailed by a scant 267 votes. If he had won New York but lost Tennessee, Clay would still have been defeated.²⁰⁴ The most important element in Clay’s loss was the dramatic increase in the Democratic vote between 1840 and 1844, largely attributable to enthusiasm for the annexation of Texas among Southerners and Westerners and to disaffection with Whiggery among Northern Catholics and immigrants who resented the party’s flirtation with nativists (like the American Republicans, also known as the Native Americans) and its choice of the militantly Protestant Theodore Frelinghuysen as Clay’s running mate.²⁰⁵

THIRD LAW PARTNERSHIP

A month after the election, Lincoln ended his partnership with Stephen T. Logan, who wanted to take into the firm his bibulous twenty-year-old son David, who had recently been admitted to the bar.²⁰⁶ Logan and Lincoln “talked the matter over and

²⁰³ Lincoln to Williamson Durely, Springfield, 3 October 1845, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:347.

²⁰⁴ William J. Cooper, The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1828-1856 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 218-19.

²⁰⁵ Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 196-207.

²⁰⁶ Logan called his son “quite wild” and “dissipated.” Logan to Lyman Trumbull, Springfield, 20 December 1860, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress. On David Logan (1824-74), see Harry E. Pratt, ed., “22 Letters of David Logan, Pioneer Oregon Lawyer,” Oregon Historical Society Quarterly 44 (1943): 253-85.

dissolved the partnership amicably and in friendship.”²⁰⁷ Herndon believed that political considerations influenced Logan’s thinking, for he “wanted to run for Congress and didn’t wish to do so while Lincoln was his partner – wanted to be free – so did Lincoln.”²⁰⁸ (In 1843, Logan had been regarded as a strong candidate for the congressional nomination. Three years later Lincoln ran for Congress successfully; two years thereafter Logan did so unsuccessfully.)²⁰⁹ John W. Bunn reported that the Logan-Lincoln firm broke up “because the partners did not agree on the fees to be charged and the manner of conducting the cases, etc. Mr. Logan was very keen after the money, and Mr. Lincoln didn’t seem to care for money at all.”²¹⁰

To replace Logan, Lincoln selected an inexperienced, erratic, impulsive attorney nearly ten years his junior, William H. Herndon, who had been studying law in the Logan-Lincoln office. In 1858, he described himself as “a young, undisciplined, uneducated, wild man.”²¹¹ Herndon later recalled that during one of Lincoln’s election campaigns, he “had found me one day among a crowd of boys alone, hallooing for him.” Herndon hated “with all his soul, the pro-slavery tendencies and professions of the Democratic party” and “mounted daily the stump, in the streets of Springfield, contending against the whole boyish population in behalf of Abraham Lincoln’s election.” Lincoln, Herndon said, “stopped, called me to him, asked my name, and

²⁰⁷ Stephen T. Logan, interview with John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 6 July 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 37-38.

²⁰⁸ William H. Herndon to Caroline Dall, Springfield, 30 December 1866, Dall Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

²⁰⁹ Illinois Gazette (Lacon), 1 April 1843.

²¹⁰ John W. Bunn quoted in “Memorandum dictated this 13th day of December 1917 by Clinton L. Conkling,” Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 337-39.

²¹¹ Herndon to Theodore Parker, Springfield, 24 November 1858, Herndon-Parker Papers, University of Iowa.

patting me on the head, said: ‘So you are a good Whig, eh? How would you like to study law with me?’” Thereafter Lincoln “never lost sight of Herndon. He talked with him about all political matters; and when he opened an office with Logan, he put Herndon into it to read law.”²¹² Lincoln asked: “Billy do you want to enter into partnership with me in the law business?” Herndon, who thought Lincoln was joking, replied: “Mr Lincoln this is something unexpected by me – it is an undeserved honor; and yet I say I will gladly & thankfully accept the kind and generous offer.” He then “burst into tears,” for, as he later said, “I thought I was in Heaven.”²¹³ Herndon recollected that “I had not yet been admitted to the bar when he made me his partner. He went over and got a license for me himself. But I had been reading for eighteen months – I was a hard student, and he knew that I was in earnest.”²¹⁴

This curious choice puzzled Lincoln’s friends and biographers, as well as Herndon himself. One close student of Lincoln’s career at the bar argued that his “reason for joining forces with Herndon defies analysis,” and concluded that “it is not clear on any rational ground why Lincoln, in the secret soul of him, should have made the choice he did, especially considering how radically their personalities differed.”²¹⁵ Queried why

²¹² Interview with Herndon in the Cincinnati Commercial, 25 July 1867; Caroline H. Dall, “Pioneering,” Atlantic Monthly, April 1867, 411.

²¹³ Herndon to Caroline Dall, Springfield, 30 December 1866, Dall Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society; Herndon in conversation with Caroline Dall in the fall of 1866, recorded in Dall’s “Journal of a tour through Illinois, Wisconsin and Ohio, Oct. & Nov. 1866,” entry for 29 October 1866, Dall Papers, Bryn Mawr College. Cf. Dall, “Pioneering,” 412. On another occasion Herndon allegedly said, “I was surprised when he invited me to become his partner. I was young in the practice and was painfully aware of my want of ability and experience; but when he remarked in his earnest, honest way, ‘Billy, I can trust you, if you can trust me,’ I felt relieved, and accepted the generous proposal.” Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 168.

²¹⁴ Interview with Herndon in the Cincinnati Commercial, 25 July 1867; Caroline H. Dall, “Pioneering,” Atlantic Monthly, April 1867, 411.

²¹⁵ John J. Duff, A. Lincoln: Prairie Lawyer (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), 97-103 (quotes on 97, 100). Joseph Fort Newton observed that “no two men were ever more unlike in temper of mind and habits of thought.” Joseph Fort Newton, Lincoln and Herndon (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Torch Press, 1910), 21.

Lincoln chose him, Herndon replied, “I don’t know and no one else does.”²¹⁶ According to John W. Bunn, John Todd Stuart had recommended Herndon to Lincoln, who accepted the suggestion “largely out of pity” for the young man. Bunn reported that Herndon’s pro-slavery father, Archer G. Herndon, enraged by the antislavery enthusiasm that his son had acquired at Illinois College, withdrew his offspring from that institution and “practically turned him adrift.” Young Herndon thereafter “was trying to make his own way, and Joshua Speed is said to have asked Mr. Lincoln to take Herndon into partnership with him.”²¹⁷ That hypothesis seems confirmed by Herndon’s acknowledgment that Lincoln “picked me out of the gutter and made a man of me. I was a drunkard till he took me in hand and kept me straight.”²¹⁸ (A Springfielder reported that “Lincoln took Herndon as a partner to save him from ruin, drink & women.”)²¹⁹ Lincoln’s sense of pity may have been aroused by Herndon’s relative poverty and by the shabby treatment he had suffered at the hands of his father, conditions not unknown to Lincoln himself. He may also have chosen Herndon because he thought the younger man would, unlike Logan or Stuart, not be a serious political rival.

²¹⁶ Herndon to Jesse Weik, Springfield, 24 February 1887, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

²¹⁷ Clinton L. Conkling was told this by John W. Bunn. See William E. Barton’s notes of an interview with Conkling, Springfield, 9 March 1920, Barton Papers, University of Chicago, and Bunn’s interview with Clinton L. Conkling, 17 December 1917, Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 336-39. In 1883, Milton Hay allegedly told George Alfred Townsend that it “was Herndon’s poverty and hard luck that made Lincoln take to him.” Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 1 September 1883. Hay later maintained that he “did not describe Mr. Herndon as being poor and an object to excite Mr. Lincoln’s sympathy.” Hay to the editor, Springfield, 7 September, Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 8 September 1883.

²¹⁸ Herndon told this to Caroline Dall in 1866. Dall, “Journal of a tour through Illinois, Wisconsin and Ohio, Oct. & Nov. 1866,” entry for 29 October 1866, Dall Papers, Bryn Mawr College. On another occasion, however, Herndon publicly denied that Lincoln had regarded him as an object of pity. Herndon to the editor, Springfield, 22 September, Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 24 September 1883. For a different interpretation, see David Donald, Lincoln’s Herndon (New York: Knopf, 1948), 20-21.

²¹⁹ Mrs. William Bailhache, wife of the co-owner of the Illinois State Journal, told this to Truman H. Bartlett. Truman Bartlett to Charles L. McLellan, Chocorua, New Hampshire, 6 October 1908, Lincoln Collection, Brown University.

Lincoln viewed Herndon as a surrogate son, a role for which the young man filled well. Lincoln was, Herndon said, “truly paternal in every sense of the word” and was “the best friend I ever had or expect ever to have except my wife & mother.”²²⁰ His partner, Herndon recalled, “moved me by a shrug of the shoulder – by a nod of the head – by a flash of the eye and by the quiver of the whole man.”²²¹ As a young man, Herndon had grown estranged from his hard-drinking, proslavery sire. When his father withdrew financial support, Herndon went to live at the Springfield store of Joshua Speed, where Lincoln also roomed. Herndon soon became a temperance zealot, perhaps as a gesture of rebellion against his father, and later spoke of Lincoln as though he were a father, calling him “the great big man of our firm” and himself “the little one,” and remarking that the “little one looked naturally up to the big one.”²²²

Lincoln defended Herndon as if he were his own son. Once, when the junior partner lay sick abed for three months, some of Lincoln’s friends urged him to end the partnership. In reply, Lincoln “exclaimed vehemently: ‘Desert Billy! No, never! If he is sick all the rest of his days, I will stand by him.’”²²³ Herndon recalled that at one point he “had become so dissipated that some of Lincoln’s friends thought proper to advise a separation, but Lincoln, with great dignity, declined their counsel.” The “manner of the

²²⁰ William Henry Herndon, “Analysis of the Character of Abraham Lincoln,” lecture of 26 December 1865, Abraham Lincoln Quarterly 1 (1941): 417; Herndon to Francis B. Carpenter, Springfield, 11 December 1866, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress; Herndon to Caroline Dall, Springfield, 28 October 1866, Dall Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society. Significantly, Herndon did not mention his father in addition to his wife and mother.

²²¹ Herndon, “Analysis of the Character of Lincoln,” 411-12.

²²² Donald, Lincoln’s Herndon, 13-14, 65-71, 129. See also Strozier, Lincoln’s Quest for Union, 81.

²²³ Reminiscences of John H. Littlefield, in “Abe Lincoln’s Wisdom,” unidentified clipping, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana; Littlefield’s lecture, “Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln,” 2 December 1875, Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 3 December 1875. See also Herndon’s remarks in Caroline Dall, “Journal of a tour through Illinois, Wisconsin and Ohio, Oct. & Nov. 1866,” entry for 29 October 1866, Dall Papers, Bryn Mawr College.

act so moved Herndon as to sober him and endeared him to Lincoln forever.”²²⁴ Lincoln stood by Herndon for sixteen years, dividing fees equally with him. Only after the election of 1860 did the partnership end. The firm of Lincoln and Herndon would handle approximately 3,400 cases, of which half involved debt collection, and argue on average fifteen cases annually before the Illinois Supreme Court.²²⁵ At first, as Herndon later recalled, he “was inclined to lawyers['] tricks false pleas – and so on. Lincoln strictly forbade it.”²²⁶

ELECTION TO CONGRESS

Lincoln quietly launched a campaign for the 1846 congressional nomination eight months before the district convention was to assemble. On the circuit, he had been practicing law in five of the district’s counties – Sangamon, Logan, Menard, Tazewell, and Woodford – which together would send sixteen delegates to the nominating convention at Petersburg on May 1. Lincoln counted on the eleven votes of Menard, Sangamon, and Logan, where he was especially well known and popular. If he could add the six delegates from the district represented by Senator Robert S. Boal (comprising Tazewell, Woodford, and Marshall Counties), he would have a majority. In the autumn of 1845, while in Lacon, he called on Boal, who said “it had always been his understanding since the Pekin convention” that Lincoln would be the nominee in 1846.²²⁷

²²⁴ Herndon interviewed in Volney Hickox, “Lincoln at Home,” Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 15 October 1874.

²²⁵ John A. Lupton, “A. Lincoln, Esquire: The Evolution of a Lawyer,” in Allen D. Spiegel, A. Lincoln, Esquire: A Shrewd, Sophisticated Lawyer in His Time (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2002), 31-32.

²²⁶ Herndon’s account in Caroline Dall, “Journal of a tour through Illinois, Wisconsin and Ohio, Oct. & Nov. 1866,” entry for 29 October 1866, Dall Papers, Bryn Mawr College.

²²⁷ Lincoln to Benjamin F. James, Springfield, 9 December 1845, Roy P. Basler, ed., Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, 1832-1865, First Supplement (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1974), 9.

Thus Lincoln seemed to have the nomination in hand, if Baker and Hardin would abide by the Pekin understanding of 1843. In keeping with its terms, Hardin had stepped down in 1844 in favor of Baker, who won the seat. Hardin was not so accommodating in 1846; despite the Pekin agreement, he intended to run for Congress once again.²²⁸ In September 1845, Lincoln called on Hardin in Jacksonville, described Baker's plans, and asked about Hardin's.²²⁹ Hardin equivocated. Two months later, Lincoln reported that "Baker is certainly off the track, and I fear Hardin intends to be on it."²³⁰ To preempt Hardin, who delayed announcing his candidacy, Lincoln obtained pledges from Whigs as he traveled the legal circuit that fall.²³¹ He also urged leading Whig editors not to support Hardin.²³² In reply, the Tazewell Whig of Pekin, the Beardstown Gazette, the Illinois Gazette of Lacon, and the Sangamo Journal backed Lincoln's candidacy; in the Seventh District, only one Whig paper – the Morgan Journal (in Hardin's hometown of Jacksonville) – was opposed.²³³

Some Whig leaders, including Allen Ford, editor of the Lacon Illinois Gazette, urged Hardin to seek the gubernatorial nomination.²³⁴ Hardin replied that although he

²²⁸ In December 1845, David Davis reported that he had just spoken with Hardin, who "wants to get back to Congress again." David Davis to Julius Rockwell, Bloomington, Illinois, 17 December 1845, transcript, Rockwell Papers, Lenox Public Library, Lenox, Massachusetts.

²²⁹ Lincoln to Hardin, Springfield, 7 February 1846, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:362.

²³⁰ Lincoln to Benjamin F. James, Springfield, 17 November 1845, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln,

²³¹ Lincoln to Benjamin F. James, Springfield, 14 January 1846, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:354; Lincoln to Hardin, Springfield, 7 February 1846, *ibid.*, 1:362; P. N. Thompson to John J. Hardin, Pekin, 12 January 1846, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum. Hardin publicly announced his interest in a letter to the editor of the Tazewell Whig, Jacksonville, 26 November 1845, copied in The Illinois Journal (Lacon), 13 December 1845.

²³² Lincoln to Benjamin F. James, Springfield, 17 and 24 November 1845 and 14 January 1846, and to Henry E. Dummer, Springfield, 18 November 1845, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:349, 350-51, 354.

²³³ Illinois Gazette (Lacon), 22 November, 13 December 1845; Riddle, Lincoln Runs for Congress, 143-44.

²³⁴ George T. M. Davis to John J. Hardin, Alton, 1 November 1843 and 10 February 1844, 27 July 1845, and Springfield, 29 January 1844, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum; Illinois Gazette

would prefer another term in Congress, he would not actively campaign for it.²³⁵ When Hardin accused of Ford trying to sidetrack his bid for Congress, the editor explained that he “would gladly see” him reelected to the U.S. House “were it not that the impression has prevailed” that Hardin had, in keeping with the Pekin agreement, yielded to Baker in 1844 and would do the same for Lincoln in 1846.²³⁶ In response to a similar charge by Hardin, Lincoln denied it, pointing out that he had gone to the office of the Sangamo Journal “and told them it was my wish that they should not fall in with the nomination for Governor.”²³⁷ Hardin’s reluctance to accept the Whig nomination for governor was easy to understand, for the solid Democratic majority in Illinois was unlikely to choose any Whig for statewide office.

Helping Lincoln carry on his extensive correspondence was Gibson W. Harris, a law student clerking in the Lincoln-Herndon office. To Harris, Lincoln dictated letters to politicians throughout the district. When the young man suggested using a printed circular letter, Lincoln demurred, contending that such a document “would not have nearly the same effect; a written one had the stamp of personality, was more flattering to the recipient, and would tell altogether more in assuring his good-will, if not his support.” So

(Lacon), 22 November 1845; Morris to Hardin, Petersburg, 19 November 1845, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum.

²³⁵ Hardin to the editor of the Tazewell Whig, Jacksonville, 26 November 1845, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum.

²³⁶ Ford’s comments, paraphrased in Robert Boal to Hardin, Lacon, 10 January 1846, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum. Ford stated publicly that “as we have in this District a number of ‘good and able men’ who in congress would reflect honor upon their constituents, we supposed, – drawing our inference from the convention that nominated Gen. Hardin, which convention also by resolution pointed to Col. Baker as his successor, – that the principle of rotation in office was thus pretty clearly recognized. Acting in the spirit of that resolution we named Mr. Lincoln as, in our opinion, a suitable person to succeed Col. Baker.” Illinois Gazette (Lacon), 13 December 1845.

²³⁷ Lincoln to Hardin, Springfield, 7 February 1846, and Lincoln to Benjamin F. James, Springfield, 24 November 1845, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:363, 350-1; Riddle, Lincoln Runs for Congress, 116-17.

Harris spent many days laboriously writing out more letters, each custom-tailored to the recipient.²³⁸

In February, Lincoln did not stay home but took “a quiet trip” politicking throughout the northern half of the district.²³⁹ Among the counties he targeted was Putnam, where hostility to slavery was strong, thanks in part to the efforts of the noted abolitionist Benjamin Lundy, who had settled there in 1838.²⁴⁰ When two Free Soilers, Thomas Alsop and Franklin King, asked Lincoln about slavery, they were, as King recalled, “so well pleased with what he said on the subject that we advised that our anti-slavery friend[s] throughout the district should cast their vote for Mr. Lincoln: which was generally done.”²⁴¹ (It is not known what Lincoln told them, but in October 1845, he had written an Ohio antislavery leader that he opposed the expansion of the peculiar institution into the western territories: “we should never knowingly lend ourselves directly or indirectly, to prevent that slavery from dying a natural death – to find new places for it to live in, when it can no longer exist in the old.”)²⁴² Herndon believed that King, Alsop, and their friends “increased Lincoln[’]s majority greatly.”²⁴³ Once in Congress, Lincoln had King’s brother appointed register of the Springfield land office,

²³⁸ Harris, “My Recollections of Abraham Lincoln,” Woman’s Home Companion, December 1903, p. 15.

²³⁹ Lincoln to Benjamin F. James, Springfield, 14 January 1846, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:353-54; Miers, ed., Lincoln Day by Day, 1:268.

²⁴⁰ On Putnam County’s hostility to slavery, see Merton L. Dillon, “Abolitionism Comes to Illinois,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 53 (1960): 396-403.

²⁴¹ Franklin T. King to Herndon, Kumler, Illinois, 12 September 1890, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 700.

²⁴² Lincoln to Williamson Durley, Springfield, 3 October 1845, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:348.

²⁴³ Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 24 September 1890, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

much to the dismay of William Butler and some other Whigs.²⁴⁴ (The Liberty Party's congressional candidate, Elihu Walcott, won only 2% of the vote in 1846.)²⁴⁵

On January 7, 1846, Lincoln explained to Dr. Robert S. Boal that he “would rejoice to be spared the labour of a contest,” but “‘being in’ I shall go it thoroughly, and to the bottom.” He would gladly have given way to Hardin if neither of them had served in Congress or if they both had done so; but “to yield to Hardin under present circumstances, seems to me as nothing else than yielding to one who would gladly sacrifice me altogether.” Lincoln declared that “turn about is fair play” and asked for “a fair shake.”²⁴⁶ Boal agreed, and when Hardin tried to enlist his support, the good doctor replied that much as he admired and liked the former congressman, “I do not see how we can avoid adopting the maxim that ‘turn about is fair play’ so far as the 7th District at least is concerned, and whether right or wrong, this is my only reason for favoring the pretensions of Mr Lincoln.”²⁴⁷

Similarly, the Tazewell Whig, edited by Benjamin F. James, chairman of the Whig District Central Committee, declared in December 1845: “we unhesitatingly say that the motto of ‘turn about is fair play’ should be recognized in the future nomination for representative.”²⁴⁸ The following February, James's paper said: “we conceive it due to

²⁴⁴ Turner R. King, interview with Herndon, McLain Station, Illinois, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 464; Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 15 and 16 January 1886, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁴⁵ Walcott received 249 of 11,418 ballots cast. Pease, ed., Illinois Election Returns, 159. Small though his vote was, it tripled the 1844 Liberty Party vote.

²⁴⁶ Lincoln to Boal, Springfield, 7 January 1846, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:353. See also Lincoln to N. J. Rockwell, Springfield, 21 January 1846, ibid., 1:359.

²⁴⁷ Robert Boal to Hardin, Lacon, 10 January 1846, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum.

²⁴⁸ Riddle, Lincoln Runs for Congress, 93.

Mr. Lincoln, that the people of this district should pay a substantial tribute to his worth, energy and patriotic exertions in behalf of Whig principles.”²⁴⁹

This argument proved effective. Ira J. Fenn, a lawyer in Lacon, informed Hardin that some of Lincoln’s backers “are endeavoring to impress upon the mind of the People that it is Lincoln[’]s right to have the office next Term” because “the doctrine of ‘taking turns’ was established by the Pekin Convention, that it has so far been acted on, that it is now Lincoln[’]s turn, that Hardin has had his turn, that it is due to Lincoln on account of his great services to the Whig party, on account of his talent & worth, that he is poor & Hardin is Rich, That This is the only Whig district, in short that this is the only crumb that a Whig politician can obtain in the State, and that no one deserves [it] more than Lincoln.” Though Fenn himself rejected the rotation-in-office principle, he told Hardin: “I shall not be surprised if the new doctrine should get a pretty good hold of the public mind. Its preachers make it appear plausible.”²⁵⁰ On January 12, P. N. Thompson of Pekin reported to Hardin that “Mr. Lincoln during his journey through the circuit sought and obtained pledges from most of what we call leading men in this vicinity. No one supposed here, until your letter was published, that you had any desire to again represent us in Congress. Had such a wish been expressed many would have hesitated before pledging themselves to Lincoln. I know that you have many warm and ardent friends here, who are ready at a suitable time to do all you can reasonably ask of them, as the matter now stands however the common conversation is ‘Hardin is a good fellow and did us and himself great credit and honor by his course in Congress, Lincoln is also a good fellow and has worked hard and faithfully for the Party, if he desires to go to Congress let

²⁴⁹ Tazewell Whig, 21 February 1846.

²⁵⁰ Ira J. Fenn to Hardin, Lacon, 23 January 1846, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum.

him go this time, turn about is fair play.’ This latter remark I hear made in the store daily.” Thompson added that “Lincoln would at this moment be the choice of probably a large majority of the Whigs. Lincoln as you are aware has always been in the habit of attending our courts, and has a very general acquaintance with our people and from this fact would have an advantage over you.”²⁵¹ A resident of Pekin asserted that Lincoln was “the first choice of nine tenths of the Whigs” in Tazewell county.²⁵²

The following month, John H. Morrison of Tremont, clerk of the Tazewell County court, told Hardin that “Lincoln spins a good yarn, is what we call a clever fellow, has mixed much with our Citizens; and has done much in sustaining Whig principles in Illinois,” and “our people think that it is Abraham’s turn now.”²⁵³ A Whig in Quincy cited the doctrine of “turn about is fair play” as a reason for supporting Lincoln’s candidacy, while a Beardstown resident argued that Lincoln’s service to the party entitled him to the nomination.²⁵⁴

Discouraged by such reports, Hardin tried to stir animosity between Lincoln and Baker. (Angered by Hardin’s tactics, Gibson Harris proposed that Lincoln respond in kind. “Gibson,” the would-be candidate replied, “I want to be nominated. I should like very much to go to Congress; but unless I can get there by fair means I shall not go. If it depends on some other course, I will stay at home.”)²⁵⁵ After visiting Hardin in September 1845, Baker urged Lincoln to withdraw from the race, arguing that if Baker

²⁵¹ Thompson to Hardin, Pekin, 12 January 1846, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum.

²⁵² Letter to the editor by “H,” Pekin, 14 February 1846, Tazewell Whig, 14 February 1846.

²⁵³ Morrison to Hardin, Tremont, 2 February 1846, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum.

²⁵⁴ Letter by “A Whig” in the Quincy Whig, n.d., and by “A Subscriber,” in the Beardstown Gazette, n.d., both copied in the Tazewell Whig, 27 December 1845.

²⁵⁵ Harris, “My Recollections of Abraham Lincoln,” Woman’s Home Companion, December 1903, p. 15.

did step down as Lincoln wanted him to, the nomination would go to Hardin, not Lincoln. Though willing to make way for his friend Lincoln, Baker was not prepared to do so for Hardin.²⁵⁶ (There “was a bitter hostility between Hardin & Baker.”²⁵⁷ In February 1846, when Hardin volunteered his services to the military, he did so through Stephen A. Douglas rather than Baker, for, he told Douglas, “the manner in which he [Baker] has recently acted towards me in endeavoring to prevent my renomination to Congress, would prevent me from making the request of him.”)²⁵⁸ When Lincoln visited Baker in September 1845, the incumbent congressman agreed to step aside if Lincoln were unwilling to “relinquish” his “pretensions.” Baker withdrew after Lincoln expressed reluctance to abandon his dream of a congressional seat.²⁵⁹

After failing to create bad blood between his two rivals, Hardin proposed that the convention system be scrapped in favor of a preferential primary election.²⁶⁰ Lincoln, sensing that the “movement is intended to injure me,” urged Whig editors to take “strong ground for the old system under which Hardin and Baker were nominated.”²⁶¹ On January 19, 1846, Lincoln calmly and firmly told Hardin that the primary scheme was unfair. In his usual accommodating fashion, Lincoln said: “I have always been in the habit of acceding to almost any proposal that a friend would make; and I am truly sorry I can not in this.” He tactfully declared his satisfaction “with the old system under which

²⁵⁶ Lincoln to Hardin, Springfield, 7 February 1846, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:362.

²⁵⁷ Stephen T. Logan, interview with Herndon, [1865-6], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 468.

²⁵⁸ Hardin to Stephen A. Douglas, Jacksonville, 5 February 1846, Douglas Papers, University of Chicago.

²⁵⁹ Lincoln to John J. Hardin, Springfield, 7 February 1846, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:362.

²⁶⁰ Letter by “a member of the Pekin Convention of 1843,” Morgan Journal (Jacksonville), 6 February 1845, copied in The Illinois Gazette (Lacon), 14 February 1845.

²⁶¹ Lincoln to B. F. James, Springfield, 16 January 1846, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:355-56.

such good men [as Baker and Hardin] have triumphed.”²⁶² In reply, Hardin denounced the convention system as “anti-republican,” criticized Lincoln for trying to derail his Congressional candidacy by having him nominated for governor, and belittled the Pekin agreement for its assumption that “the District is a horse which each candidate may mount and ride a two mile heat without consulting any body but the grooms & Jockeys.” He implied that he had never agreed to the Pekin compromise in the first place.²⁶³ Hardin’s contention seemed disingenuous, for he announced shortly after winning the congressional race in 1843 that he would not seek reelection. In 1844, he kept his word and did not challenge Baker for the nomination.²⁶⁴

Refusing to be provoked, Lincoln on February 7 gently criticized Hardin’s assumption “that the District is a horse which, the first jockey that can mount him, may whip and spur round and round, till jockey, or horse, or both, fall dead on the track.” He insisted that his qualifications for the congressional seat were not inconsiderable: “If I am not, (in services done the party and in capacity to serve in future) near enough your equal, when added to the fact of your having had a turn, to entitle me to the nomination, I scorn it on any and all other grounds.” Lincoln concluded with a mild protest: “After, by way of imputations upon me, you have used the terms ‘management’ ‘manoevering’ and ‘combination’ quite freely, you, in your closing paragraph say: ‘For it is mortifying to

²⁶² Lincoln to Hardin, Springfield, 19 January 1846, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:356-57.

²⁶³ Although Hardin’s letter has not survived, passages from it are quoted in Lincoln’s detailed response of 7 February 1846, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:360-65. An article in the Morgan Journal, perhaps inspired by Hardin, developed the last point at length. Riddle, Lincoln Runs for Congress, 118-29. The article maintained that Lincoln won through “corruption,” “chicanery,” and “management.” The Democratic Illinois State Register said that despite Hardin’s protestation, he had nothing to do with the article, “we have good reason to believe . . . that the Morgan journal’s article is approved by the intimate friends of Gen. Hardin, who are in possession of some facts as we have been informed, which, if published would confound the candidate of the Springfield Junto.” Illinois State Register (Springfield), 6 March 1846.

²⁶⁴ Lincoln to Benjamin F. James, Springfield, 24 November 1845, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:350-1; Riddle, Lincoln Runs for Congress, 116-17.

discover that those with whom I have long acted & from whom I expected a different course, have considered it all fair to prevent my nomination to congress.’ Feeling as I do, the utter injustice of these imputations, it is somewhat difficult to be patient under them – yet I content myself with saying that if there is cause for mortification any where, it is in the readiness with which you believe, and make such charges, against one with whom you truly say you have long acted; and in whose conduct, you have heretofore marked nothing as dishonorable. I do not mean to be unjust, or ungenerous; and I therefore[e] am slow to believe that you will not yet think better and think differently of this matter.”²⁶⁵

Though nettled by Hardin’s failure to abide by the Pekin accord, Lincoln insisted that “nothing be said” against him.²⁶⁶ This injunction was obeyed by his supporters in the press, including the Sangamo Journal, which later explained that “we cautiously avoided saying any thing in our paper, that might touch the feelings of either party.”²⁶⁷ One “H” protested in the Tazewell Whig that the “friends of Messrs. Lincoln and Baker have a right to complain of a want of good faith on the part of Mr. Hardin and his friends,” and Allen N. Ford emphatically denied Hardin’s interpretation of the Pekin convention resolution: “If the principle of rotation in office is not only recognized in that resolution [passed in Pekin in 1843] but by Gen. H. himself . . . then we confess our incapacity to comprehend the import of language or action.”²⁶⁸

²⁶⁵ Lincoln to Hardin, Springfield, 7 February 1846, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:360-65.

²⁶⁶ Lincoln to Benjamin F. James, Springfield, 9 December 1845, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, First Supplement, 9.

²⁶⁷ Sangamo Journal, 26 February 1846.

²⁶⁸ Riddle, Lincoln Runs for Congress, 124-25, 127. Mark W. Delahay claimed that he wrote articles for Whig newspapers protesting Hardin’s attempt to scrap the old county and district convention system. Mark W. Delahay, “Abraham Lincoln,” pamphlet (New York: Daniel H. Newhall, 1939), unpaginated. Delahay attended the conventions which nominated Baker in 1844 and Lincoln in 1846, edited the Naples Saturday Evening Post, and ran unsuccessfully for district attorney in 1844 and 1848.

On January 31, the Whigs of Athens named Lincoln as their choice for Congress.²⁶⁹ Two weeks later, on the eve of other precinct meetings, Hardin, despairing of his prospects, withdrew from the race.²⁷⁰ He had failed to act as promptly and work as energetically as had Lincoln. Hardin's announcement bluntly addressed the Pekin convention agreement: "I deem it an act of justice to myself to state, that this report [that he had agreed to step aside after one term and let Baker and Lincoln have their turns] is utterly without foundation. I never made any bargain, or had any understanding directly or indirectly with Mr. Baker, or any other person, respecting either the last or any future canvass for Congress. Neither Mr. Baker, or any other voter of the District knew I would not be a candidate for re-election, until I stated that fact publicly after my election."²⁷¹ Along with his withdrawal statement, Hardin revealed his scheme for a preferential primary to replace the convention, but did not provide a copy of Lincoln's reply.

As this statement indicates, there is some doubt about the exact terms of the Pekin understanding.²⁷² Stephen T. Logan thought that "there was no agreement – no understanding between Hardin – Baker – Lincoln & Logan about rotation in office."²⁷³ Though there may have been no formal pact, James H. Matheny stated that "there was a kind of implied understanding that Hardin – Baker – Lincoln should rotate in

²⁶⁹ Sangamo Journal, 5 February 1846.

²⁷⁰ The Sangamon County precinct elections for delegates to the county convention took place on February 21.

²⁷¹ Hardin to the voters of the seventh congressional district, Jacksonville, 16 February 1846, Sangamo Journal, 26 February 1846.

²⁷² A good summary of the case for and against Lincoln's interpretation of the Pekin convention can be found in a statement signed "a member of the Pekin Convention of 1843," Morgan Journal (Jacksonville), 6 February 1845, copied in The Illinois Gazette (Lacon), 14 February 1845; and a response in that same issue of the Gazette.

²⁷³ Stephen T. Logan, interview with Herndon, [1865-6], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 468.

Congress.”²⁷⁴ Whatever the case might have been, in 1846 many Seventh District Whigs believed that there had been an agreement of some sort whereby Hardin would serve one term in Congress, then Baker, then Lincoln. As the Sangamo Journal observed, Hardin’s contention “is strictly true,” but “the doings of the Pekin Convention did seem to point that way; and the General’s voluntary declination, as to the canvass of ’44 was, by many, construed into an acquiescence on his part. These things had led many of his most devoted friends to not expect him to be a candidate at this time.”²⁷⁵

Though bitter, Hardin graciously refused to run as an independent candidate. He publicly declared that “if I had cause for personal complaint, I would rather suffer real or supposed wrong, than be the means of producing dissension amongst my political friends.”²⁷⁶ Lincoln, fearful of Whig defections, did his best to salve the wounded feelings of Hardin and his followers.²⁷⁷ By May 1, when the Whig district convention assembled in Petersburg, Lincoln’s nomination was a foregone conclusion.²⁷⁸ Lincoln may well have feared that Hardin might thwart his future aspirations. In 1847, however, Hardin was killed in the Mexican War, thus clearing the political field for Lincoln. David Davis believed that if Hardin had survived the war, “he would have controlled the politics & the affairs of the State.”²⁷⁹ Baker, who could have posed a similar threat to Lincoln’s political future, moved to Galena, Illinois, in 1848, and soon thereafter to California.

²⁷⁴ James H. Matheny, interview with Herndon, [1865-6], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 471. Cf. Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 169-70.

²⁷⁵ Sangamo Journal, 26 February 1846.

²⁷⁶ Hardin to Simeon Francis, Jacksonville, 20 February 1846, Illinois Gazette (Lacon), 28 February 1846.

²⁷⁷ Lincoln to James Berdan, Springfield, 26 April 1846, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:380.

²⁷⁸ Petersburg correspondence, 1 May, Sangamo Journal, 7 May 1846.

²⁷⁹ David Davis to [William P. Walker], Springfield, 25 June 1847, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

In late May, the Democrats of the Seventh District nominated for Congress the well-known Methodist circuit-riding preacher, Peter Cartwright.²⁸⁰ (Earlier, when it seemed that John Calhoun might be the Democratic candidate, articles in the Sangamo Journal attacked him fiercely. The editor of the Illinois State Register accused Lincoln of penning these “bitter, unjust, and malignant” pieces.)²⁸¹ Almost a quarter-century older than Lincoln, the colorful, energetic, ambitious Cartwright was “of medium height, but of gigantic build, with a forehead covered with a shaggy coat of hair, a broad chest, and small eyes deeply set, heavy eyebrows.”²⁸² Another Methodist preacher described Cartwright at forty as having an “attractive and strongly marked physique, nearly six-feet in height, erect and vigorous. His large, well-formed head was covered with closely curling, coal black hair and poised on a short, thick neck. A large, round, clean-shaven face, with small, bright, piercing black eyes, small Grecian nose and a mouth at once mobile, expressive and firm . . . with a countenance which could blaze with mirth, flash with contempt, frown with wrath or darken with defiance. His intellectual faculties corresponded with his superb physical organism, and his perceptions were quick, clear, and usually correct. But giving intensity to his entire being was that indomitable energy characterizing those ‘born to rule,’ and securing to such a recognition of their position as ‘leaders.’”²⁸³ In New Salem, a few miles from his home near Pleasant Plains, the

²⁸⁰ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 29 May 1846. On Cartwright, see Robert Bray, Peter Cartwright: Legendary Frontier Preacher (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

²⁸¹ “The Journal & Mr. Calhoun,” Illinois State Register (Springfield), 15 January 1846. The offending articles appeared in the Sangamo Journal on January 8 and 15. The former issue is not extant; in the latter, entitled “The Register and the Late County Convention,” Calhoun is not mentioned.

²⁸² T. G. Onstot, Pioneers of Mason and Menard Counties (Forest City, Ill.: Onstot, 1902), 103.

²⁸³ Chauncey Hobart, quoted in Bray, Cartwright, 159. A similar portrait appeared in the Illinois Daily Journal (Springfield), 23 January 1850.

combative Cartwright was known as something of a bully.²⁸⁴ T. G. Onstot, a friend of the preacher, reported that he was “warlike” and “much like a boy with a chip on his shoulder.” But he had winning qualities too, Onstot recalled, among them “great conversational powers, coupled with keen wit.” A “man of great force of character,” he “generally carried his point” as a preacher and a politician. Onstot said that Cartwright “could interest a crowd as well as any man I ever knew.”²⁸⁵

Little is known about the Lincoln-Cartwright campaign, for the press virtually ignored it.²⁸⁶ Herndon described it as “an energetic canvass of three months . . . during which Lincoln kept his forces well in hand. He was active and alert, speaking everywhere, and abandoning his share of business in the law office entirely.”²⁸⁷ James Gourley recalled that Lincoln made a speech in Petersburg “against Peter Cartwright in his Congression[al] race – 1846 He skinned Peter & Erastus Wright – the abolitionist.”²⁸⁸ The only extant newspaper report of an appearance by Lincoln merely noted that at Lacon, he “gave us a good speech” on the tariff. “In a most logical, argumentative effort, he demonstrated the necessity of a discriminating tariff, and the excellence of that adopted by the whig congress of 1842; and also that the consumer does not usually pay the tariff, but the manufacturer and importer.” Lincoln concluded “with some general observations on the Mexican war, annexation of Texas, and the Oregon question.”²⁸⁹

²⁸⁴ Thomas P. Reep, Lincoln at New Salem (Petersburg, Illinois: Old Salem Lincoln League, 1927), 104.

²⁸⁵ Onstot, Pioneers of Mason and Menard Counties, 112, 103.

²⁸⁶ See Bray, Cartwright, 206-13.

²⁸⁷ Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 172.

²⁸⁸ James Gourley, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 452. See also Thomas Dent, undated letter to the editor, Chicago Legal News, 12 April 1917, 293; Dent to William E. Barton, Chicago, 10 June 1921, Barton Papers, University of Chicago.

²⁸⁹ Speech in Lacon, 18 July 1846, The Illinois Gazette (Lacon), 25 July 1846.

Those observations may have resembled what Lincoln told Williamson Durely, a farmer and merchant of Putnam County, a hotbed of abolitionism: “I never was much interested in the Texas question. I never could see much good to come of annexation; inasmuch, as they were already a free republican people on our own model; on the other hand, I never could very clearly see how the annexation would augment the evil of slavery. It always seemed to me that slaves would be taken there in about equal numbers, with or without annexation.” But insofar as the annexation of Texas might strengthen slavery, he was opposed to it: “It is possibly true, to some extent, that with annexation, some slaves may be sent to Texas and continued in slavery, that otherwise might have been liberated. To whatever extent this may be true, I think annexation an evil.”²⁹⁰ Curiously, Lincoln ignored the objection that if Texas were admitted to the Union as a Slave State, the pro-slavery forces would gain power in Congress and the Electoral College.

Lincoln’s views on the Mexican War at its commencement are not known. It has been alleged that he supported the war in 1846 before changing his mind and criticizing it in 1847.²⁹¹ In later years, the Illinois State Register claimed that “Lincoln went through the district and addressed the people, sometimes in the presence of the [army] volunteers themselves, and at all times vowed his purpose to support a vigorous prosecution of the war. He commended the patriotism of the volunteers, and declared he would, if elected, devote his best efforts to promote their comfort and welfare and sustain their interests and

²⁹⁰ Lincoln to Durley, Springfield, 3 October 1845, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:348.

²⁹¹ Beveridge, Lincoln, 1:381.

honor.”²⁹² Since the Register was trying to portray Lincoln, then a candidate for higher office, as a hypocrite, its account of his 1846 campaign is suspect.

The evidence of Lincoln’s enthusiasm for the war is skimpy. The press reported that he, along with Governor Thomas Ford, Dr. Elias Merryman, David L. Gregg, and David B. Campbell, spoke to a group of cadets and militia members in Springfield on May 30, 1846. The brief newspaper account merely says that these men addressed the audience “on the present condition of the country, and the necessity of the prompt and united action of her citizen soldiery, to sustain her national character, secure our national rights, as well as a lasting peace. The speeches were in the right spirit – warm, thrilling, effective.”²⁹³ No distinction was made among the remarks of the various speakers.

In all likelihood, Lincoln was agnostic about the war rather than a strong supporter. In January 1848, he asserted that when hostilities broke out, “it was my opinion that that all those who, because of knowing too little, or because of knowing too much, could not conscientiously approve the conduct of the President, in the beginning of it, should, nevertheless, as good citizens and patriots, remain silent on that point, at least till the war should be ended.”²⁹⁴ He later opined that “the principal motive” for the president’s decision to provoke the war “was to divert public attention from the surrender of ‘Fifty-four, forty, or fight’ to Great Britain, on the Oregon boundary question.”²⁹⁵

What Lincoln thought about the Oregon question is unknown. Democrats taunted him about his silence on the issue. In May 1846, the Illinois State Register asked: “Is

²⁹² Illinois State Register (Springfield), 16 July 1858, 31 May 1860.

²⁹³ Sangamo Journal, 4 June 1846.

²⁹⁴ Speech in the House, 12 January 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:432.

²⁹⁵ Autobiography written for John L. Scripps, [ca. June 1860], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:66.

Lincoln for 54 40 [i.e., all of the Oregon Territory], or is he for ‘compromising’ away our Oregon territory to England . . .? This, the People ought to know, before they vote next August. No shuffling, Mr. Lincoln! Come out, square!”²⁹⁶ Albert J. Beveridge, noting that the Sangamo Journal enthusiastically supported the claim that the U.S. was entitled to all of the Oregon territory, inferred that Lincoln did too, for his views and the Journal’s usually coincided.²⁹⁷ But in the summer of 1846, the Illinois State Register complained that while “the Oregon question was pending the Journal expressed no opinion in regard to it, for the reason that it had not the courage to go with its party, against the 54 40 claim of our government. Since the question has been settled, it denounces Mr. Polk for subscribing to the proposition for which every whig Senator voted.”²⁹⁸ In the spring of 1845, several mass meetings about the Oregon question were held at Springfield and addressed by many leading political figures of central Illinois, but not Lincoln. Like his opponents Stephen A. Douglas and John Calhoun, Lincoln’s Whig allies Edward D. Baker and John J. Hardin were outspoken champions of expelling the British from the lower half of the Oregon Territory, which was jointly occupied by Great Britain and the U.S.²⁹⁹ Lincoln probably shared the views of most congressional Whigs, who urged a peaceful compromise with the British rather than the belligerent “Fifty-four forty or fight” stance favored by many senate Democrats.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁶ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 8 May 1846.

²⁹⁷ Beveridge, Lincoln, 1:382.

²⁹⁸ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 10 July 1846.

²⁹⁹ Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 20 June 1845.

³⁰⁰ Frederick Merk, Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation (New York: Knopf, 1963), 39-40.

According to Shelby Cullom, Lincoln spoke extensively during the 1846 campaign in Tazewell County, where Cullom's family lived. His father Richard took Lincoln "in his carriage all over the county to his meetings," recalled Cullom, who was an adolescent at the time: "Mr. Lincoln would say, 'Fellow citizens: Maj. Cullom has been everywhere with me, and has heard this speech time and again. The only way I can deceive him with it is to go down to the other end and give it to him backward.' With that he made one of those curious jerks with his long arms which we remember as so characteristic of him."³⁰¹

Because of his extensive legal practice, Lincoln was well acquainted with many people throughout the district. In 1847, a Boston journalist described a stagecoach ride he shared with Lincoln from Chicago to Springfield. Once they reached the Seventh Congressional District, Lincoln "knew, or appeared to know, every body we met, the name of the tenant of every farm-house, and the owner of every plot of ground. Such a shaking of hands – such a how d'ye do – such a greeting of different kinds, as we saw, was never seen before; it seemed as if he knew every thing, and he had a kind word, a smile and a bow for every body on the road, even to the horses, and the cattle, and the swine."³⁰²

Lincoln spent little money on his election. Prominent Whigs collected a \$200 campaign fund, of which the candidate used only 75¢. "I did not need the money," Lincoln said as he returned the balance of the cash. "I made the canvass on my own horse, my entertainment being at the houses of friends, cost me nothing; and my only

³⁰¹ Cullom, in Stevens, A Reporter's Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 154.

³⁰² Springfield correspondence, [11 July 1847], for the Boston Courier, in J. H. Buckingham, "Illinois as Lincoln Knew It: A Boston Reporter's Record of a Trip in 1847," ed. Harry E. Pratt (pamphlet; Springfield, 1938), 33-34.

outlay was 75 cents for a barrel of cider, which some farmhands insisted I should treat them to.”³⁰³

Eighteen years later, Lincoln described the 1846 campaign as one relatively free of acrimony, compared to others he had participated in: “It is a little singular that I who am not a vindictive man, should have always been before the people for election in canvasses marked for their bitterness; always but once: When I came to Congress it was a quiet time: But always besides that the contests in which I have been prominent have been marked with great rancor.”³⁰⁴ Yet there was some bad feeling generated by Cartwright’s tactics. In an 1860 campaign biography of Lincoln, John Locke Scripps reported that his subject “spoke in the principal towns in the district, on the political issues of the day. His opponent did not meet him in discussion, but chose his own peculiar way of electioneering.”³⁰⁵ One of those “peculiar ways” was to launch a whispering campaign denouncing Lincoln as an infidel.³⁰⁶ Robert Boal of Lacon recollected that “Cartwright sneaked through this part of the district, after Lincoln, and grossly misrepresented him.”³⁰⁷ Days after the election, an anonymous writer alleged in The Illinois Gazette that Lincoln was an infidel and claimed that if it “had been known,

³⁰³ Joshua Speed, quoting Lincoln, in Helen Nicolay, Personal Traits of Abraham Lincoln (New York: Century, 1912), 110-11.

³⁰⁴ Michael Burlingame and John R. Turner Ettliger, eds., Inside Lincoln’s White House: The Complete Civil War Diary of John Hay (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), 243 (entry for 8 November 1864).

³⁰⁵ Scripps, Life of Lincoln, ed. Basler and Dunlap, 85.

³⁰⁶ Lincoln to Allen Ford, Springfield, 11 August 1846, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:383.

³⁰⁷ Boal to Richard Yates, Lacon, 25 August 1850, Yates Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

Mr. L. would not have gotten a single vote in Marshall county.”³⁰⁸ Many “Religious – Christian whigs hated to vote for Lincoln on that account.”³⁰⁹

Such attacks angered Lincoln. When the president of Illinois College told him that “many of us are praying for your success in the election,” Lincoln replied: “I do not know. We are dealing with men that would just as soon lie as not.”³¹⁰ At Postville, where Cartwright had accused Lincoln of being a “skeptic,” the Whig candidate responded by reading to his audience a passage from the Illinois constitution stipulating that “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under this state.” Lincoln added: “Brother Cartwright may be well posted in theology but he is not informed as to the constitution of his own state which he has several times sworn to maintain.”³¹¹

To rebut more thoroughly the charge of atheism, Lincoln on July 31 issued a handbill protesting that he was no “open scoffer at Christianity.” He acknowledged that he was “not a member of any Christian church” but asserted that he had “never denied the truth of the Scriptures” and had “never spoken with intentional disrespect of religion in general, or of any denomination of Christians in particular.” At one time, he admitted, he “was inclined to believe in what . . . is called the ‘Doctrine of Necessity’ – that is, that the human mind is impelled to action, or held in rest by some power, over which the mind

³⁰⁸ “An Enquirer,” quoted in “D.” to Allen Ford, n.d., Illinois Gazette (Lacon), 15 August 1846.

³⁰⁹ James H. Matheny, interview with Herndon, November 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 432.

³¹⁰ Julian M. Sturtevant, Jr., quoting his father, Julian M. Sturtevant, in a letter to William E. Barton, Cleveland, 2 August 1919, Barton Papers, University of Chicago. Sturtevant, Sr., claimed that “[l]ong before he was thought of as a candidate for the Presidency, I knew him [Lincoln] intimately.” J. M. Sturtevant, Jr., ed., Julian M. Sturtevant: An Autobiography (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1896), 286.

³¹¹ Lawrence B. Stringer’s unpublished biography of Lincoln, written ca. 1927, p. 92, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

itself has no control.” He had even defended this proposition in private discussions – never publicly – but had given up doing so five years earlier. That doctrine, he asserted, was “held by several of the Christian denominations.” He concluded by declaring that “I do not think I could myself, be brought to support a man for office, whom I knew to be an open enemy of, and scoffer at, religion.” No man, he said, “has the right thus to insult the feelings, and injure the morals, of the community in which he may live. If, then, I was guilty of such conduct, I should blame no man who should condemn me for it; but I do blame those, whoever they may be, who falsely put such a charge in circulation against me.”³¹²

This statement appeared less than forthcoming to some residents of the Seventh District. One of them said of Lincoln’s “lawyer like declaration” that in “war, politics and religion, a ruse is admissible.”³¹³ In this document, Lincoln seemed to make two different claims: that he never believed in infidel doctrines, and that he never publicly espoused them. If the former were true, the latter would be superfluous; if the former were untrue, the latter would be irrelevant. Moreover, his reference to the doctrine of necessity was a dodge, for he was accused of infidelity, not fatalism.³¹⁴ In addition, his assertion that he had “never denied the truth of the Scriptures” is belied by the testimony of friends, as is the implication that he was skeptical only in his early years. After moving to Springfield in 1837, Lincoln continued expressing the unorthodox views he had proclaimed in New Salem. John Todd Stuart recalled that “he was an avowed and open Infidel – Sometimes bordered on atheism. I have often and often heard Lincoln & . . . Herndon who was a free

³¹² Handbill, “To the voters of the Seventh Congressional District,” 31 July 1846, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:382.

³¹³ “D.” to Allen Ford, n.d., Illinois Gazette (Lacon), 22 August 1846.

³¹⁴ Bray, Cartwright, 211.

thinker talk over this Subject. Lincoln went further against Christian beliefs – & doctrines & principles than any man I ever heard: he shocked me Lincoln always denied that Jesus was . . . the son of God.”³¹⁵ James Matheny maintained that Lincoln “was an infidel – have heard Lincoln call Christ a bastard Lincoln attacked the Bible & new Testament on two grounds – 1st From the inherent or apparent contradiction under its lids & 2dly From the grounds of Reason – sometimes he ridiculed the Bible & New Testament – sometimes seemed to scoff at it.” On occasion he “bordered on absolute Atheism: he went far that way & often shocked me.” Though Matheny knew Lincoln well from 1834 to 1860, he “never heard that Lincoln changed his views.”³¹⁶

Lincoln told William Herndon “a thousand times that he did not believe that the Bible, etc., were revelations of God, as the Christian world contends.”³¹⁷ Lincoln and Edward D. Baker often discussed Christianity, with the former challenging the authenticity of scripture and the latter defending it. Lincoln was never “ribald or blasphemous in the slightest degree.” Their “controversy was candid and sincere: Lincoln seemed unable to accept the inspired or to bring his mind to the belief that they were inspired.”³¹⁸

In Springfield, Lincoln also debated religion with Albert Taylor Bledsoe, a Whig leader and attorney. In 1842-43, while both men boarded at the Globe Tavern, “Lincoln

³¹⁵ John Todd Stuart, interview with Herndon, [by 2 March 1870], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 576.

³¹⁶ James H. Matheny, interviews with Herndon, [1865-66] and [by 2 March 1870], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 472, 576-77.

³¹⁷ Herndon to Ward Hill Lamon, Springfield, 25 February 1870, Lamon Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

³¹⁸ Milton Hay was the source of this story. J. Otis Humphrey to I. W. Read, n.p., 9 March 1892, copy, Paul Angle Papers, Chicago History Museum.

was always throwing out his Infidelity to Bledsoe, ridiculing Christianity, and especially the divinity of Christ.”³¹⁹ From “various conversations with him on the subject of religion,” Bledsoe recalled that Lincoln “always seemed to deplore his want of faith as a very great infelicity, from which he would be glad to be delivered.” Lincoln spoke about this subject “with an air of such apparent modesty, that his gloom and despair, seeming to border on a state of insanity,” aroused in Bledsoe “no other feelings than one of deep compassion.”³²⁰

Lincoln’s 1846 handbill may seem like a clever attorney’s ingenious exercise in obfuscation, but it is more than that. The “doctrine of necessity,” as Lincoln understood it, was a kind of determinism akin to that of Jeremy Bentham and of later depth psychologists, who maintained that acts and thoughts are dictated by forces beyond the control of the rational, conscious individual. Lincoln believed that no act was unselfish. For example, when he aided birds or animals in distress, he was not behaving altruistically; he selfishly wished to avoid the pain that his hypersensitive conscience would cause if he did not so act. At the opposite end of the moral spectrum, unkind and ungenerous acts were often committed not out of malice or evil, but because their perpetrators were in the grip of unconscious forces and “knew not what they did.” This belief inclined Lincoln to be unusually charitable, forbearing, non-judgmental, compassionate, and forgiving, especially in his later years.³²¹ Yet Lincoln found

³¹⁹ Green Caruthers, a fellow boarder at Springfield’s Globe Tavern, in John E. Remsburg, Abraham Lincoln: Was He a Christian? (New York: Truth Seeker Company, 1893), 200.

³²⁰ Bledsoe, review of Ward Hill Lamon, The Life of Abraham Lincoln, Southern Review 12 (April 1873): 354.

³²¹ William Herndon to Joseph S. Fowler, Springfield, 18 February 1886, Herndon Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. For an analysis of the nature and origin of Lincoln’s belief in the “doctrine of necessity,” see Allen C. Guelzo, Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 117-21.

determinism hard to square with the fundamental principles of law and morality. He told his good friend Joseph Gillespie “that he could not avoid believing in predestination although he considered it a very unprofitable field of speculation because it was hard to reconcile that belief with responsibility for one[’]s act[s].”³²²

Cartwright’s tactics availed him little in those localities where he and Lincoln were well known, but in the northern part of the district the whispering campaign proved effective.³²³ Shortly after the election, The Illinois Gazette of Lacon declared that “Mr. Lincoln is right in supposing that Mr. Cartwright circulated the story [about Lincoln’s infidelity] in this county, and also that he, Mr. L., lost some votes thereby. It appears the Rev. gentleman circulated the same story in other parts of the District.” The Gazette’s editor, Allen Ford, denounced such reveling “in the filth of defamation and falsehood.”³²⁴

Though he lost Woodford and Marshall Counties, Lincoln won the district’s other nine as he captured 56% of the vote, topping Hardin’s 53% in 1843 and Baker’s 52% in 1844.³²⁵ His success was part of a national trend, which saw Whigs triumphant in 53.6% of congressional contests, a substantial improvement over the party’s showing in 1844 and 1845.³²⁶ The turnout in the Seventh District in 1846 was somewhat lower than it had been in 1843 and 1844, perhaps because the outcome was a foregone conclusion and also because many voters were serving in the Mexican War, which had broken out three

³²² Gillespie to Herndon, Edwardsville, 8 December 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 506. See also Gillespie’s 1882 statement in Oldroyd, ed., Lincoln Memorial, 457.

³²³ Lincoln to Allen Ford, Springfield, 11 August 1846, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:383-84.

³²⁴ Illinois Gazette (Lacon), 15 August 1846.

³²⁵ Lincoln received 6340 votes to Cartwright’s 4829. Pease, ed., Illinois Elections, 159. Lincoln ran significantly ahead of Baker and Hardin in Logan and Mason Counties; he did markedly worse than Baker in Putnam, but much better than Baker in Sangamon and Mason in addition to Logan and Menard. He won by a larger margin than any victor in the history of the district. Winkle, The Young Eagle, 233.

³²⁶ Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 238.

months earlier.³²⁷ The Illinois State Register blamed Cartwright’s defeat on “General Apathy,” noting that the traditionally large Whig majority in the district “has served to dispirit the democrats and deter them from exertion.”³²⁸

Many Democrats probably supported Lincoln, for in the seventh congressional district the Whig nominee for governor received only 426 more votes than his Democratic opponent, while Lincoln won 1511 more votes than Cartwright.³²⁹ Some of the men who voted for both Lincoln and the Democratic gubernatorial candidate may have objected to Cartwright’s profession.³³⁰ During the campaign, “an aspiring Democrat said to Mr. Lincoln, ‘Such is my utter aversion to the meddling of preachers in politics, that I will vote for you Even at the risk of losing cast with my party, if you think the contest doubtful.’” Lincoln responded: “I would like your vote, but I fully appreciate your position, and will give you my honest opinion on the morning of Election day.” When that day arrived, Lincoln told this Democrat: “I am now satisfied that I have got the preacher by the [balls], and you had better keep out of the ring.”³³¹ Other opponents of the Whig party may have voted for Lincoln because they admired (in the words of a Springfield Democrat) “his commanding talents and deserving popularity.”³³²

³²⁷ In 1846, 11,418 votes were cast in the Seventh District Congressional race; in 1844, 12,697 had been cast; and in 1843, 11,789. Pease, ed., Illinois Elections, 159, 148, 141, 351.

³²⁸ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 7 August 1846, 28 July 1848. See also Israel W. Crosby to the voters of the Seventh Congressional District, Springfield, 11 January, Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 15 January 1847; Turner R. King, interview with Herndon, McLain Station, Illinois, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 464.

³²⁹ Pease, ed., Illinois Election Returns, 159.

³³⁰ Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 172.

³³¹ Judge Samuel Treat, statement for Herndon, [1865-6], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 483.

³³² Israel W. Crosby to the voters of the Seventh Congressional District, Springfield, 11 January, Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 15 January 1847.

Lincoln felt little elation upon achieving the goal that he had long sought; he confided to Joshua Speed that his election “to Congress, though I am very grateful to our friends for having done it, has not pleased me as much as I expected.”³³³ Such a letdown is not unusual among the compulsively ambitious, for the attainment of power satisfies only temporarily the hunger for approval rooted in a damaged sense of self-worth.³³⁴ Another reason for the lack of euphoria on Lincoln’s part may have been the peculiar congressional timetable stipulating that the Thirtieth Congress would not meet until December 1847. Wishing to avoid conflict with fellow Whigs, he refused to fill the unexpired term of his friend Edward D. Baker, who in January 1847 quit his seat to participate in the Mexican War.³³⁵

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³³³ Lincoln to Speed, Springfield, 22 October 1846, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:389-91.

³³⁴ A case in point is Woodrow Wilson, who declared that “I am so constituted that, for some reason or other, I never have a sense of triumph.” According to Alexander and Juliette George, Wilson’s inability to savor his triumphs stemmed from his “insatiable ambition,” which was “compulsive” because in childhood his father had damaged his sense of self-worth. George and George, Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House: A Personality Study (New York: Dover, 1964), 320-21. In his late twenties, Wilson told his fiancée that “success does not flush or elate me, except for the moment.” Ibid., 23.

³³⁵ Sangamo Journal, 7 January 1847. According to John Henry, the candidate who eventually received the nomination, “it was . . . supposed that Mr. Lincoln would be a candidate for the nomination. – Mr. Lincoln, however, at the meeting [of the legislators on December 30], declined being considered a candidate When the matter was first spoken of, I supposed, as a matter of course, that Mr. Lincoln would receive the nomination.” John Henry to the voters of the Seventh Congressional District, 7 January 1847, Sangamo Journal, 14 January 1847. Henry told Richard Yates that those legislators attending the meeting “mostly thought that as Lincoln had to go the next session that we had better send him to fill the vacancy[.] when we met Linco[l]n declined coming in contact with any friend[.] concequently friend [William] Brown was nominated with out op[p]osition[.] in fact there was not time to make anny arrangements.” Henry to Yates, Springfield, 2 January 1847, Yates Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. To serve out Baker’s term, the Whig legislators chose William Brown, who said that friends pressured him to withdraw because “they looked upon the present election, as a race for dollars and cents – and that, feeling under obligations to [John] Henry for favors, heretofore conferred, and as he was poor, and I was not, and the money would of great service to him, – they should vote for him on that ground.” Brown to the voters of the Seventh Congressional District, 9 January, Sangamo Journal, 14 January 1847. Cf. Paul Findley, A. Lincoln: The Crucible of Congress (New York: Crown, 1979), 54-57. Findley called Lincoln’s decision “one of the great mysteries of his life.” The Sangamon County Whigs may have wanted to appease their party colleagues in Morgan County by nominating either Brown or Henry. Illinois State Register (Springfield), 8 January 1847.

While waiting for his congressional term to begin, Lincoln indulged his poetical muse, writing verses inspired by his 1844 campaign swing through Indiana. The sight of old haunts which he had not visited for fourteen years prompted him to compose what he called “poetry, or doggerel” about his youth.³³⁶ In 1846 and 1847, he submitted to attorney Andrew Johnston a few poems, some of which Johnston published anonymously in the Quincy Whig. (Lincoln did not want his authorship revealed, for, as he told Johnston, “I have not sufficient hope of the verses attracting any favorable notice to tempt me into risk being ridiculed for having written them.”)³³⁷ Their most striking feature is morbidity, reflecting Lincoln’s obsession with death, rooted in his childhood experiences of loss.

To attorney Johnston he sent not only his own verses but also a copy of his favorite poem, William Knox’s “Mortality.”³³⁸ “I would give all I am worth, and go into debt, to be able to write so fine a piece as I think that is,” he told Johnston.³³⁹ Gibson W. Harris heard Lincoln recite the poem often in his law office.³⁴⁰ Lawrence Weldon observed him one night on the legal circuit sit “by the decaying embers of an old-fashioned fire-place” and “quote at length” from “Mortality.”³⁴¹ Lincoln said that Knox’s

³³⁶ Lincoln to Andrew Johnston, Tremont, 18 April 1846, and Springfield, 25 February 1847, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:378, 392. The poems can be found ibid., 1:367-69, 378-79, 385-89.

³³⁷ Lincoln to Andrew Johnston, Springfield, 25 February 1847, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:392.

³³⁸ Maurice Boyd, William Knox and Abraham Lincoln: The Story of a Poetic Legacy (Denver: Sage Books, 1966); William D. Kelley in Allen Thorndike Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln by Distinguished Men of His Time (New York: North American Review, 1886), 268-70; James Grant Wilson in Wilson, ed., Intimate Memories of Lincoln, 423-24; Lawrence Weldon’s speech before the Springfield bar, June 1865, in Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 374-75; Francis B. Carpenter, Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln: The Story of a Picture (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1866), 58-61.

³³⁹ Lincoln to Andrew Johnston, Tremont, 18 April 1846, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:378.

³⁴⁰ Harris, “My Recollections of Abraham Lincoln,” Woman’s Home Companion, January 1904, 13.

³⁴¹ Weldon in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 213.

verses “sounded to him as much like true poetry as anything that he had ever heard.”³⁴²

He discovered it in a newspaper in 1845, shortly after his campaign swing through Indiana.³⁴³ The memories thus awakened made him susceptible to the appeal of Knox’s dirgelike quatrains:

Oh why should the spirit of mortal be proud!
 Like a swift flying meteor – a fast flying cloud –
 A flash of lightning – a break of the wave,
 He passeth from life to his rest in the grave.
 The leaves of the Oak, and the Willow shall fade,
 Be scattered around, and together be laid.
 And the young and the old, and the low and the high,
 Shall moulder to dust, and together shall lie.

The third stanza may have been particularly meaningful to Lincoln:

The infant a mother attended and loved –
 The mother that infant’s affection who proved
 The husband that mother and infant who blest,
 Each – all are away to their dwellings of rest.

³⁴² Ward Hill Lamon, Recollections of Abraham Lincoln, 1847-1865, ed. Dorothy Lamon Teillard (2nd ed.; Washington, D. C.: published by the author, 1911), 155. See also Lamon to S. J. Perkins, Washington, 30 September 1864, Lamon Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

³⁴³ Douglas L. Wilson, “Abraham Lincoln’s Indiana and the Spirit of Mortal,” Indiana Magazine of History 87 (1991): 155-70.

This might well have brought back images of Nancy Hanks, her aunt and uncle, and his infant brother, all of whom died in Lincoln's youth.³⁴⁴ The fourth stanza perhaps conjured up memories of Ann Rutledge and of his sister:

The maid on whose brow, on whose cheek, on whose eye
 Shone beauty and pleasure – her triumphs are by;
 And alike from the memory of the living erased
 And the memory of mortals, who loved her and praised –

The remaining ten stanzas continue in a similar vein but without such obvious reference to Lincoln's life.

His own 1846 poem, "My Childhood Home I See Again," is similarly obsessed with "loved ones lost." The first canto clearly deals with Lincoln's own family and friends.

My childhood-home I see again,
 And gladden with the view;
 And still as mem'ries crowd my brain,
 There's sadness in it too.

O memory! thou mid-way world
 'Twixt Earth and Paradise,
 Where things decayed, and loved ones lost
 In dreamy shadows rise.

And freed from all that's gross or vile

³⁴⁴ See Robert V. Bruce, "Lincoln and the Riddle of Death" in Gabor Boritt, ed., The Lincoln Enigma: The Changing Faces of an American Icon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 130-45.

Seem hallowed, pure, and bright,
Like scenes in some enchanted isle,
All bathed in liquid light.
As distant mountains please the eye,
When twilight chases day –
As bugle-tones, that, passing by,
In distance die away –
As leaving some grand water-fall
We ling'ring, list it's roar,
So memory will hallow all
We've known, but know no more.
Now twenty years have passed away,
Since here I bid farewell
To woods, and fields, and scenes of play
And school-mates loved so well.
Where many were, how few remain
Of old familiar things!
But seeing these to mind again
The lost and absent brings.
The friends I left that parting day –
How changed, as time has sped!
Young childhood grown, strong manhood grey,

And half of all are dead.
 I hear the lone survivors tell
 How nought from death could save,
 Till every sound appears a knell,
 And every spot a grave.
 I range the fields with pensive tread,
 And pace the hollow rooms;
 And feel (companions of the dead)
 I'm living in the tombs.³⁴⁵

These verses call to mind Isaac Watts's hymn, "The Shortness of Life, and the Goodness of God," which Lincoln copied into his commonplace book of 1824-26:

Time what an em[p]ty vaper [']tis and days how swift they are
 swift as an indian arr[ow] fly on like a shooting star
 the presant moment Just [is here] then slides away in h[as]te
 that we can never say they['re ours] but [only say] th[ey]'re past.³⁴⁶

Lincoln was fond of "The Inquiry" by Charles Mackay, which treated death and the afterlife:

Tell me, ye winged winds
 That round my pathway roar,
 Do ye not know some spot

³⁴⁵ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:378-79.

³⁴⁶ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:1.

Where mortals weep no more?
Some lone and pleasant vale
Some valley in the West,
Where, free from toil and pain,
The weary soul may rest?
The loud wind dwindled to a whisper low,
And sighed for pity as it answered, No.

Tell me, thou mighty deep,
Whose billows round me play,
Knows't thou some favored spot,
Some island far away,
Where weary man may find
The bliss for which he sighs;
Where sorrow never lives
And friendship never dies?
The loud waves rolling in perpetual flow
Stopped for awhile and sighed to answer, No.
And thou, serenest moon,
That with such holy face
Dost look upon the earth
Asleep in Night's embrace –
Tell me, in all thy round
Hast thou not seen some spot

Where miserable man
Might find a happier lot?
Behind a cloud the moon withdrew in woe,
And a voice sweet but sad responded, No.

Tell me, my secret soul,
Oh, tell me, Hope and Faith,
Is there no resting-place
From sorrow, sin, and death?
Is there no happy spot
Where mortals may be blessed,
Where grief may find a balm
And weariness a rest?
Faith, Hope, and Love, best boon to mortals given,
Waved their bright wings and whispered,

Yes, in Heaven.³⁴⁷

One of Lincoln's favorite speeches from Shakespeare was Richard II's lament, which John Hay heard him read in Springfield and Washington:

For heaven's sake, let us sit upon the ground,
And tell sad stories of the death of kings: –
How some have been deposed, some slain in war,
Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed;

³⁴⁷ Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Lincoln, 201-2.

Some poisoned by their wives, some sleeping killed;
 All murdered: – For within the hollow crown
 That rounds the mortal temples of a king
 Keeps Death his court; and there the antic sits,
 Scoffing his state, and grinning at his pomp, –
 Allowing him a breath, a little scene
 To monarchize, be feared, and kill with looks;
 Infusing him with self and vain conceit, –
 As if this flesh, which walls about our life,
 Were brass impregnable, – and humored thus,
 Comes at the last, and with a little pin
 Bores through his castle walls and – farewell, King!

This speech had “a peculiar fascination” for Lincoln.³⁴⁸

Lincoln was also fond of sad songs. As a boy in Indiana, he used to sing “John Anderson’s Lamentation,” which contained the line: “In yonder cold graveyard, her body doth lie.”³⁴⁹ Milton Hay recalled hearing Lincoln in 1839 and 1840 singing in his office “pathetic pieces” like “Mary’s Dream,” “Lord Ullin’s Daughter,” and “The Soldier’s Dream.”³⁵⁰ His favorite song was a ballad titled “Twenty Years Ago,” which Ward Hill

³⁴⁸ John Hay, “Life in the White House in the Time of Lincoln,” (1890), in Michael Burlingame, ed., At Lincoln’s Side: John Hay’s Civil War Correspondence and Selected Writings (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 137. See also T. C. Evans, Of Many Men (New York: American News Company, 1888), 95.

³⁴⁹ Elizabeth Crawford to Herndon, 21 February 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 215-16.

³⁵⁰ Milton Hay to John Hay, Springfield, 8 February 1887, Hay Papers, Brown University.

Lamon heard him sing often in Illinois and later in the White House. The verses that most affected him were these:

I've wandered to the village, Tom; I've sat beneath the tree
 Upon the schoolhouse play-ground, that sheltered you and me:
 But none were left to greet me, Tom, and few were left to know
 Who played with us upon the Green, some twenty years ago.
 Near by the spring, upon the elm you know I cut your name, –
 Your sweetheart's just beneath it Tom; and you did mine the same.
 Some heartless wretch has peeled the bark, – t'was dying sure but slow,
 Just as she died whose name you cut, some twenty years ago.
 My lids have long been dry, Tom, but tears came to my eyes;
 I thought of her I loved so well, those early broken ties:
 I visited the old churchyard, and took some flowers to strew
 Upon the graves of those we loved, some twenty years ago.³⁵¹

Lincoln especially admired Oliver Wendell Holmes's "The Last Leaf," which also dealt with the death of loved ones.³⁵² He was fondest of this stanza:

The mossy marbles rest
 On lips that he has pressed
 In their bloom;
 And the names he loved to hear

³⁵¹ Lamon, Reminiscences of Lincoln, 150-51.

³⁵² Whitney, Life on the Circuit, ed. Angle, 426-27; John A. Logan, manuscript lecture on Lincoln, n.d., Logan Papers, Library of Congress.

Have been carved for many a year
On the tomb.

Of these verses he said: “For pure pathos, in my judgment, there is nothing finer than those six lines in the English language!”³⁵³ Henry C. Whitney remembered many occasions when Lincoln recited the stanza and “tears would come unbidden to his eyes.” Whitney was doubtless right in speculating that those tears were shed because the poetry called to Lincoln’s mind the “grave [of his mother and sister] at Gentryville, or that [of Ann Rutledge] in the bend of the Sangamo.”³⁵⁴

In his copy of Byron’s poetry, Lincoln turned down the page containing these sorrowful verses:

The spell is broke, the charm is flown!
Thus is it with life’s fitful fever!
We madly smile when he should groan;
Delirium is our best deceiver.
Each lucid interval of thought
Recalls the woes of Nature’s charter,
And he that acts as wise men ought,
But lives, as saints have died, a martyr.³⁵⁵

Lincoln also liked to quote from Thomas Moore’s “The Fire-Worshippers”:

³⁵³ Carpenter, Six Months at the White House, 59. See also James Grant Wilson’s reminiscences in Wilson, ed., Intimate Memories of Lincoln, 423-24; Hay, “Life in the White House,” 336; Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 200.

³⁵⁴ Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 238.

³⁵⁵ Benjamin Brown French, Witness to the Young Republic: A Yankee’s Journal, 1828-1870, ed. Donald B. Cole and John J. McDonough (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1989), 532 (entry for 24 February 1867).

Oh, ever thus, from childhood's hour,
 I've seen my fondest hopes decay;
 I never loved a tree or flower
 But 'twas the first to fade away.
 I never nurs'd a dear gazelle,
 To glad me with its soft black eye,
 But when it came to know me well
 And love me, it was sure to die.³⁵⁶

Lincoln's poetry and his literary taste suggest that his predisposition to depression was rooted in the death of family members in his early years.³⁵⁷

Another psychological concern appears in a poem he composed after his 1844 visit to southwestern Indiana: fear of insanity. His schoolmate Matthew Gentry, three years older than Lincoln, had at the age of nineteen gone berserk and tried to kill his parents. Thereafter he was locked up as a madman. Lincoln's verses reveal the horror he felt as he observed Gentry:

But here's an object more of dread
 Than aught the grave contains –
 A human form with reason fled,
 While wretched life remains.

When terror spread, and neighbors ran

³⁵⁶ Howard K. Beale and Alan W. Brownsword, eds., Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln and Johnson (3 vols.; New York: W.W. Norton, 1960), 2:26 (entry for 9 May 1864).

³⁵⁷ Burlingame, Inner World of Lincoln, 92-113.

Your dangerous strength to bind,
And soon, a howling, crazy man,
Your limbs were fast confined;

How then you strove and shrieked aloud,
Your bones and sinews bared;
And fiendish on the gazing crowd
With burning eyeballs glared;

And begged and swore, and wept, and prayed,
With maniac laughter joined;
How fearful were these signs displayed
By pangs that killed the mind!

And when at length the drear and long
Time soothed thy fiercer woes,
How plaintively thy mournful song
Upon the still night rose!

I've heard it oft as if I dreamed
Far distant, sweet and lone,
The funeral dirge it ever seemed
Of reason dead and gone.

To drink its strains I've stole away,

All stealthily and still,

Ere yet the rising god of day

Had streaked the eastern hill.

Air held her breath; trees with the spell

Seemed sorrowing angels round,

Whose swelling tears in dewdrops fell

Upon the listening ground.

But this is past, and naught remains

That raised thee o'er the brute;

Thy piercing shrieks and soothing strain

Are like, forever mute.

Now fare thee well! More thou the cause

Than subject now of woe.

All mental pangs by time's kind laws

Hast lost the power to know.

O death! Thou awe-inspiring prince

That keepst the world in fear,

Why dost thou tear more blest ones hence,
 And leave him lingering here?³⁵⁸

Lincoln's reaction to Gentry's mental problems suggests that he may have feared that he might lose his own mind.³⁵⁹ After all, following the death of Ann Rutledge in 1835 and after breaking his engagement to Mary Todd in 1841, he had, in the opinion of his friends and neighbors, gone crazy. Perhaps he feared that such an attack would recur. He may also have feared that his wife was insane. She had behaved irrationally early in their marriage, flinging hot coffee in his face at the Globe Tavern. According to William Herndon, Lincoln "held his wife partly insane for years."³⁶⁰ During his presidency, he told the superintendent of the Old Capitol prison that the "caprices of Mrs. Lincoln, I am satisfied, are the result of partial insanity."³⁶¹

ECONOMIC ISSUES

As he prepared to take his seat in Congress, Lincoln devoted further thought to the tariff issue, about which he wrote memoranda. The most striking passage in them, foreshadowing his mature antislavery pronouncements, begins with a Biblical quotation that he would cite frequently in the 1850s and 1860s: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou

³⁵⁸ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:385-86.

³⁵⁹ Douglas L. Wilson, "Young Man Lincoln," in Boritt, ed., Lincoln Enigma, 31-35.

³⁶⁰ Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 2 January 1882, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁶¹ Reminiscences of William P. Wood, Washington Sunday Gazette, 16 January 1887, photocopy, Randall Papers, Library of Congress. See also Elizabeth Keckley, Behind the Scenes; or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House (New York: G. W. Carleton, 1868), 104-5.

eat bread.”³⁶² He argued that since “most good things are produced by labour, it follows that [all] such things of right belong to those whose labour has produced them. But it has so happened in all ages of the world, that some have laboured, and others have, without labour, enjoyed a large proportion of the fruits. This is wrong, and should not continue. To [secure] to each labourer the whole product of his labour, or as nearly as possible, is a most worthy object of any good government.”³⁶³ This principle, which in 1847 Lincoln used to justify protective tariffs, he would later cite while attacking slavery. In 1858, for example, he described the proslavery argument as “the same old serpent that says you work and I eat, you toil and I will enjoy the fruits of it.” He declared that “each individual is naturally entitled to do as he pleases with himself and the fruit of his labor.”³⁶⁴ The relevance of this principle to the slavery debate is obvious. In applying it to the issue of protectionism, Lincoln drew a distinction between useful and useless labor. The latter was effort squandered on importing goods from abroad when they could be produced as cheaply at home. Curiously, as he had done in his earlier discussions of the tariff, Lincoln ignored the powerful “infant industries” rationale. Nor did he emphasize the argument made by many other Whigs, that without high tariffs, an unfavorable balance of trade developed which hurt the U.S. as specie was drained overseas, leading to a credit shortage and consequent economic stagnation.

In 1847, Lincoln also devoted time and attention to one of his favorite issues, internal improvements. On July 6, he had an opportunity to speak on that subject as a delegate to the Harbor and River Convention in Chicago, which attracted over 10,000

³⁶² Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 7:368.

³⁶³ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:412.

³⁶⁴ Speech at Chicago, 10 July 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:500, 493.

people to “a mere city of shanties built on the black prairie soil,” with 16,000 inhabitants and “no railroads, no pavements, no sewers, scarcely an apology for waterworks.”³⁶⁵

There delegates from the North and West remonstrated against President Polk’s veto of a river and harbor appropriations bill, an action that Westerners interpreted as a pro-Southern blow to their region’s interests.³⁶⁶ When news of the veto reached Chicago, ships there lowered flags to half-mast and a sandbar at the harbor’s entrance was christened “Mount Polk.” Snags in rivers became known as “Polk stalks.”³⁶⁷ At the convention, a New York Democrat, David Dudley Field, gave an “able and courteous” speech favoring a strict construction of the Constitution and supporting only limited river and harbor improvements. Horace Greeley wrote that Lincoln responded “briefly and happily” to Field.³⁶⁸ When he rose amid vigorous applause to speak, a Pennsylvanian asked who he was. “Oh,” came the reply, “that is Abe Lincoln of Springfield, the ablest and wittiest stump speaker on the Whig side in the State of Illinois.”³⁶⁹ His appearance was less impressive than his oratory. As one delegate recalled, the “angular and awkward” Lincoln wore “a short-waisted, thin swallow-tail coat, a short vest of same

³⁶⁵ William Bross, “What I Remember of Early Chicago,” Mabel McIlvaine, ed., Reminiscences of Chicago during the Forties and Fifties (Chicago: Lakeside Press, 1913), 34-35.

³⁶⁶ Mentor L. Williams, “The Background of the Chicago River and Harbor Convention, 1847,” Mid-America 30 (1948): 219-32, and “The Chicago River and Harbor Convention, 1847,” Mississippi Valley Historical Review 35 (1949): 607-26; Joseph L. Eisendrath, “Lincoln’s First Appearance on the National Scene, July, 1847,” Lincoln Herald 76 (1974): 59-62.

³⁶⁷ Theodore Calvin Pease, The Frontier State, 1818-1848 (vol. 2 of The Centennial History of Illinois, ed. Clarence Walworth Alvord; Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1919), 334.

³⁶⁸ New York Weekly Tribune, 17 July 1848. One delegate alleged that Field’s auditors, not sympathizing with his argument, tried to silence him with shouts of derision. Lincoln then rose “and in a few well chosen words, to the effect that full and free discussion had been invited and must be favorable to the cause they had at heart, ended the disturbance, and Mr. Field was permitted to proceed.” Reminiscences of E. B. McCagg, Chicago Tribune, 12 February 1900.

³⁶⁹ The editor of the Pittsburgh Journal asked the question. Pittsburgh Journal n.d., copied in the New York Tribune, 7 June 1860.

material, thin pantaloons, scarcely coming down to his ankles, a straw hat and a pair of brogans with woolen socks.”³⁷⁰

Some Whigs, not sympathizing with Field’s argument, had tried to silence him with shouts of derision. Ever the peacemaker, Lincoln urged the delegates to consider themselves “a band of brothers” and not interrupt each other: “I hope there will be no more interruption – no hisses – no jibes.” Responding to Field’s remarks, Lincoln respectfully pointed out that the New Yorker had ignored a central issue: “Who is to decide differences of opinion on constitutional questions? What tribunal? How shall we make it out? The gentleman from Pennsylvania (the Hon. Andrew Stewart) says Congress must decide. If Congress has not the power, who has? Is it not, at least, for Congress to remedy the objection [the the Constitution did not authorize Congress to appropriate funds for internal improvements], and settle this great question. If there is any other tribunal, where is it to be found? My friend from Pennsylvania, Mr. Benton and myself, are much alike on that subject.”³⁷¹

Lincoln ignored the landmark Supreme Court ruling in *Marbury vs. Madison* that the Court itself was the ultimate arbiter of constitutional disputes. A decade later he would at much greater length question the Court’s power to declare acts of Congress unconstitutional.

LINCOLN’S OLD-MAN ARCHETYPE

In Chicago, the thirty-eight-year-old Lincoln first became known as “Old Abe.” Elihu B. Washburne of Galena recalled that one day “several of us sat on the sidewalk

³⁷⁰ Elihu B. Washburne in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 16.

³⁷¹ Missouri Republican (St. Louis), 12 July 1847.

under the balcony of the Sherman House, and among the number [was] the accomplished scholar and unrivaled orator, [S.] Lisle Smith. He suddenly interrupted the conversation by exclaiming, “There is Lincoln on the other side of the street. Just look at “Old Abe,”” and from that time we all called him ‘Old Abe.’” Washburne thought Smith’s remark peculiar: “It was then for the first time I heard him called ‘Old Abe.’ Old Abe, as applied to him, seems strange enough, as he was then a young man.”³⁷² Even as he grew older, Lincoln did not show obvious signs of aging. At fifty, he was described as “so exceedingly ‘well preserved’ that he would not be taken for more than thirty eight.”³⁷³ The following year, a journalist reported from Springfield that “Mr. Lincoln’s age, I believe, is fifty-one, but he certainly has no appearance of being so old. His hair is black, hardly touched with gray, and his eye is brighter than that of many of his juniors.”³⁷⁴ Another journalist at that time wrote that “the popular sobriquet, ‘Honest Old Abe,’ is inappropriate and somewhat lacking in truth. . . . Why should a man be called old when he is in the very prime of life? . . . No one who looks upon his animated features, upon his determined eye, or listens to his hearty, fascinating conversation, would call that man old.”³⁷⁵ A friend who had known him for more than two decades said in 1860, the “term

³⁷² Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 16. In May 1858, Washburne referred to this incident, calling Lincoln’s attention to a letter in which he referred to him as “Old Abe,”

a “sobriquet Lisle Smith gave you, in old Whig times.” E. B. Washburne to Lincoln, Washington, 6 May 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁷³ Cincinnati Commercial, 17 September 1859, in Abraham Lincoln: A Press Portrait, ed. Herbert Mitgang (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 137.

³⁷⁴ Springfield correspondence, 6 November, New York Tribune, 10 November 1860.

³⁷⁵ Springfield correspondence, 4 September, New York Evening Post, 8 September 1860.

‘old’ is hardly as applicable as the epithet honest, for he is in the full vigor of life, with a powerful constitution, and no symptoms of decay, mental or physical.”³⁷⁶

Yet there were others who sensed what S. Lisle Smith did when he called Lincoln “Old Abe.” A friend from Lincoln’s youthful days in Indiana reported that “Abe was always a man though a boy.”³⁷⁷ The journalist George Harris Monroe said that when Lincoln was thirty-nine, “he had the aspect of one considerably older than his real age.”³⁷⁸ Gibson W. Harris recollected that “‘Honest Old Abe’ was a colloquialism familiar to all Springfield before he was thirty-seven,” and that Lincoln deemed himself old “when in his late thirties.”³⁷⁹ At thirty-nine, Lincoln declared to Herndon: “I suppose I am now one of the old men.”³⁸⁰ Reportedly, he once said, “I . . . have been kept so crowded with the work of living that I felt myself comparatively an old man before I was forty.”³⁸¹ In 1854, Lincoln told a friend that people began calling him “old” before he had turned thirty.³⁸²

Why he should be deemed old when he betrayed few physical signs of aging cries out for explanation. The Swiss psychologist Carl Jung maintained that everyone is dominated

³⁷⁶ Letter from an unidentified “man of high position,” Springfield, 4 June 1860, New York Tribune, 11 June 1860.

³⁷⁷ William Wood, interview with Herndon, 15 September 1865, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 124.

³⁷⁸ “Lincoln in Massachusetts,” unidentified clipping, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

³⁷⁹ Gibson William Harris, “My Recollections of Abraham Lincoln,” Woman’s Home Companion, December 1903, p. 15.

³⁸⁰ Lincoln to Herndon, Washington, 10 July 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:497.

³⁸¹ Robert H. Browne, Abraham Lincoln and the Men of His Time (2 vols.; Cincinnati: Jennings and Pye, 1901), 1:86.

³⁸² Janet Jennings in Abraham Lincoln, Tributes from His Associates: Reminiscences of Soldiers, Statesmen and Citizens, ed. William Hayes Ward (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1895), 237–38.

by an archetypal figure, a condition unrelated to the experiences of childhood.³⁸³ Lincoln's archetype seems to have been the Old Man, combining the qualities of the Wise Elder and the Great Father.³⁸⁴ Under the influence of that Old Man archetype, Lincoln unconsciously radiated the quality of being old, despite his physical appearance. The power of that archetype helps explain why so many Illinoisans regarded him with filial reverence. In early 1861, when Lincoln visited his stepmother, the residents of Charleston greeted him with special warmth. One of them remembered that “[o]ld men and women talked to Mr. Lincoln with the confidence and assurance of loving children in a great family reunion.”³⁸⁵ A train conductor in Illinois recollected that “I have eaten with him many times at the railroad eating houses, and you get very neighborly if you eat together in a railroad restaurant. . . . Everybody tried to get as near Lincoln as possible when he was eating, because he was such good company, but we always looked at him with a kind of wonder. We couldn't exactly make him out. . . . [T]here was something about him that made plain folks feel toward him a good deal as a child feels toward his father.”³⁸⁶ That “something” was Lincoln's Old Man archetype. During his presidency, it would play a vital role in sustaining Union morale, for many Northerners trusted him as one would trust a benevolent, wise father.³⁸⁷

³⁸³ For an elaboration on this fundamental point, see M. Esther Harding, The “I” and the “Not-I”: A Study in the Development of Consciousness, Bollingen Series 79 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965), 130-76.

³⁸⁴ Jung employs the term Senex to describe the archetype. I use the English translation Old Man. For a brief outline of the qualities of the Senex, both positive and negative, see James Hillman, “Senex and Puer: An Aspect of the Historical and Psychological Present,” in James Hillman et al., Puer Papers (Irving: Spring, 1979), 15-23.

³⁸⁵ Reminiscences of R. H. Osborne, “Lincoln with His People,” Lerna, Illinois, Weekly Eagle, Lincoln anniversary issue, February 1928, broadside, William E. Barton Papers, uncatalogued addendum, Box 7, folder 129, University of Chicago.

³⁸⁶ E. J. Edwards, quoting the conductor, Gilbert Finch, then retired and living in Connecticut, New York Times, 24 January 1909.

³⁸⁷ See Burlingame, Inner World of Lincoln, 73-91.

DEFENDING A SLAVE OWNER

Although Lincoln had not dealt with the slavery issue during his congressional campaign, he was confronted with it in the fall of 1847 when a Kentucky slaveholder, Robert Matson, employed his legal services to help recover a slave family.³⁸⁸ Matson cultivated a farm in Coles County, Illinois, with slaves imported from Kentucky, where he also owned a farm. At first, when he began this pattern, he would after each harvest return them across the Ohio River and the following spring import a new gang from Kentucky; this procedure was legal in Illinois, where the law only forbade a slaveholder from domiciling bondsmen.³⁸⁹ Matson nonetheless permanently retained a slave in Illinois named Anthony Bryant as an overseer, thus technically freeing him. Bryant, however, did nothing to assert his free status until the spring of 1847, when his wife Jane and their children, who had arrived in Illinois two years earlier, seemed in danger of being permanently separated from him. (In 1845, Matson evidently feared that if he

³⁸⁸ Matson v. Bryant et al., and Matson for use of Coles County, Illinois v. Rutherford, LPAL, case files # 00714 and # 00715; Orlando B. Ficklin, “Gen. Usher F. Linder,” Charleston, Illinois, Courier, 15 January 1885, copied in the Tuscola, Illinois, Review, 7 September 1922; Duncan T. McIntyre, “Matson Slave Trial,” Oakland (Illinois) Herald, 17 July 1896; Duncan T. McIntyre, “Lincoln and the Matson Slave Case,” Illinois Law Review 1 (1906-7): 386-91; Duff, Prairie Lawyer, 130-47; Jesse W. Weik, “Lincoln and the Matson Negroes: A Vista into the Fugitive-Slave Days,” Arena 17 (April 1897): 752-58; Hiram Rutherford, interview with Jesse W. Weik, Oakland, [3?] April 1892, in Weik, The Real Lincoln: A Portrait, ed. Michael Burlingame (1922; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 372-73; Charles H. Coleman, Abraham Lincoln and Coles County, Illinois (New Brunswick, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1955), 104-11; Willene Hendrick and George Hendrick, eds., On the Illinois Frontier: Dr. Hiram Rutherford, 1840-1848 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 62-63, 131-43; Albert A. Woldman, Lawyer Lincoln (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1937), 56-66; Mark E. Steiner, An Honest Calling: The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), 103-36; Anton-Hermann Chroust, “Abraham Lincoln Argues a Pro-Slavery Case,” American Journal of Legal History 5 (1961): 299-308.

³⁸⁹ Caton, Early Bench and Bar of Illinois, 144.

returned the slaves to Kentucky, they would be seized by his creditors.)³⁹⁰ Matson's hot-tempered, jealous housekeeper-mistress, known as "a vicious negro hater," suspected that he was sexually involved with Jane Bryant and demanded that the slave woman and her children be sold.³⁹¹ To thwart that possibility, Anthony Bryant enlisted the help of two local abolitionists, Hiram Rutherford, a Pennsylvania-born physician, and Gideon Ashmore, a hotel-keeper known as "a wide-awake business man" whom "nothing pleased so well as a stiff legal fight." A "strong anti-slavery man" and "a strict Presbyterian" who "hated the Methodists most cordially," Ashmore offered to shelter Jane Bryant and her offspring at his hotel.³⁹² Matson sued for possession of his slaves, who at the direction of a justice of the peace were temporarily jailed in Charleston.

Soon thereafter, Lincoln arrived in Coles County, where he had suits pending in the circuit court. There he was approached by Usher F. Linder, an attorney for Matson, who wanted to sue Rutherford and Ashmore for damages.³⁹³ Subsequently Dr. Rutherford asked Lincoln to serve as his lawyer. Rutherford recalled that "I told in detail the story of my troubles, reminded him that we had always agreed on the questions of the day, and asked him to represent me at the trial of my case in court." Lincoln seemed hesitant. "He listened attentively," Rutherford said, "as I recited the facts leading up to the controversy with Matson but I noticed that a peculiarly troubled look came over his face now and then, his eyes appeared to be fixed in the distance beyond me and he shook his head

³⁹⁰ McIntyre, "Lincoln and the Matson Slave Case," 386.

³⁹¹ "A Story of Long Ago," The Sunday Sun (Mattoon, Illinois), 24 August 1884; Weik, "Lincoln and the Matson Negroes," 753.

³⁹² Duncan T. McIntyre, "Matson Slave Trial," Oakland (Illinois) Herald, 17 July 1896.

³⁹³ According to a local historian of Charleston, as soon as Matson discovered that his slaves were missing, he had gone to Springfield and consulted with Lincoln. McIntyre, "Lincoln and the Matson Slave Case," 387.

several times as if debating with himself some question of grave import.” Lincoln responded “with apparent reluctance” that he must refuse for “he had already been counseled with in Matson’s interest and was therefore under professional obligations to represent the latter unless released.” With “expressions more or less bitter in tone,” Rutherford chided Lincoln, who then attempted “in his plausible way” to explain that “as a lawyer, he must represent and be faithful to those who counsel with and employ him.” Lincoln then consulted with Linder and obtained a release. When, however, he informed Rutherford that he was now free to represent him in court, his offer was spurned. Later the hot-tempered Rutherford, whose “pride was up,” admitted to an interviewer, “I was a little too hasty.”³⁹⁴ So it was that Lincoln came to represent a slave owner in court. Had Rutherford been less petulant, Lincoln would have represented the blacks and their protectors.

However reluctant Lincoln may have been to act on Matson’s behalf, he argued his client’s case forcefully.³⁹⁵ According to Orlando Ficklin, co-counsel along with Charles Constable for the Bryants, Lincoln presented “his opponents’ points and arguments with such amplitude and seeming fairness and such liberality of concession of their force and strength that it increased in his adversaries their confidence of success.” But then with “trenchant blows” and “cold logic” he subtly wove together and presented evidence favoring his client’s case. Ficklin recalled that the “fact that General Matson had at such a time when he placed a slave on his Illinois farm, publicly declared that he

³⁹⁴ Hiram Rutherford, interview with Weik, Oakland, Illinois, [3?] April 1892, Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 372.

³⁹⁵ Some writers maintain that Lincoln deliberately made a poor showing in the hopes that his client would lose, but such an interpretation is not borne out by the surviving evidence. Weik, “Lincoln and the Matson Negroes,” 756; Beveridge, Lincoln, 1:396; Woldman, Lawyer Lincoln, 64.

was not placed there for permanent settlement, and that no counter statement had ever been made publicly or privately by him, constituted the web and woof of the argument of Mr. Lincoln, and these facts were plausible, ingeniously and forcibly presented to the court, so as to give them all the effect and significance to which they were entitled and more.”³⁹⁶

According to a local historian of Charleston, who evidently interviewed participants in the case, Lincoln made a different argument, stressing procedural rather than substantive issues: “His main contention was that the question of the right of the negroes to their freedom could only be determined by a regular habeas corpus proceedings, and not by a mere motion, as was then attempted. His argument was masterful along that line, but it was very clear that he was carefully and adroitly shunning the vital question at issue in the case.” Judge William Wilson, chief justice of the Illinois Supreme Court, asked him: “your objection is simply to the form of the action by which, or in which this question should be tried, is it not?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Now, if this case was being tried on issue joined in a habeas corpus, and it appeared there, as it does here, that this slave owner had brought this mother and her children voluntarily, from the state of Kentucky, and had settled them down on his farm in this state, do you think, as a matter of law, that they did not thereby become free?”

³⁹⁶ Ficklin, “Usher Linder.”

A hush fell over the packed courtroom as Lincoln prepared to address the substance rather than the form of the case. He answered: “No, sir, I am not prepared to deny that they did.”³⁹⁷

Lincoln winced when opposing counsel Charles Constable quoted from John Philpot Curran’s well-known speech about slavery: “I speak in the spirit of the British law, which makes liberty commensurate with and inseparable from British soil; which proclaims even to the stranger and sojourner the moment he sets his foot upon British earth, that the ground on which he treads is holy and consecrated by the genius of universal emancipation.”³⁹⁸ Constable’s co-counsel, Orlando Ficklin, gave an impassioned speech citing the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 and the Illinois Constitution of 1818. After the trial, Lincoln complimented him: “Ficklin do you know that I think that latter part of your speech was as eloquent as I ever listened to?”³⁹⁹

Lincoln’s case was weak, for Jane Bryant had been in Illinois for two years and was clearly not just a seasonal worker. His client therefore lost. In the court’s decision, Judge Wilson ruled that “Neither the place of residence, nor the declared intentions of Matson, countervail the fact that he voluntarily domiciled his servants here for two years or upwards. Even if, from some contingency, they had remained but a day, the circumstance of his having transferred their domicile from Kentucky, and fixed it in Illinois, would have produced the same result.” Thus “by bringing Jane and her children into the State of Illinois, and domiciling them here,” Matson “had forfeited all claim to

³⁹⁷ McIntyre, “Lincoln and the Matson Slave Case,” 390-91.

³⁹⁸ Ficklin’s recollection, in Weik, “Lincoln and the Matson Negroes,” 757.

³⁹⁹ Ficklin, “Usher Linder.”

their services, and entitled them to be discharged therefrom.”⁴⁰⁰ With the aid of Dr. Rutherford, the Bryant family was able to immigrate to Liberia, where they were observed the following year living “truly in a deplorable condition.”⁴⁰¹

Lincoln’s reason for agreeing to represent Matson cries out for analysis. His participation in that case has been called “one of the greatest enigmas of his career,” the “most profound mystery ever to confound Lincoln specialists,” and “one of the strangest episodes in Lincoln’s career at the bar.”⁴⁰² Six years earlier, in the case of Bailey vs. Cromwell, he and John Todd Stuart had successfully defended a black woman who sued for her freedom. They convinced the Illinois Supreme Court that the sale of the woman, who had been purchased in Illinois, was invalid, for she was free under the provisions of both the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 and the Illinois State Constitution.⁴⁰³ It was just the argument that Ficklin had used in the Matson case.

Lincoln in accepting the slaveholder Matson as a client demonstrated his agreement with Judge George Sharswood, a well-known mid-nineteenth-century American commentator on legal ethics who advised lawyers “not to pass moral judgments on potential clients, but to rely on the legal process itself to determine the merits of the claim.” Sharswood believed that an attorney “is not morally responsible for the act of the party in maintaining an unjust cause, nor for the error of the court, if they

⁴⁰⁰ “In the Matter of Jane, a Woman of Color,” Western Law Journal 5:205-6, quoted in Steiner, An Honest Calling, 121.

⁴⁰¹ S. S. Ball, Report on the Condition and Prospects of the Republic of Liberia: Made to the Tenth Annual Meeting of the Colored Baptist Association (Alton, Ill.: Telegraph Office, 1848), quoted in Paul M. Angle, “Aftermath of the Matson Slave Case,” Abraham Lincoln Quarterly 3 (1944): 148.

⁴⁰² Woldman, Lawyer Lincoln, 56; Duff, A. Lincoln, 144; Paul M. Angle’s comment in his edition of Henry C. Whitney, Life on the Circuit with Lincoln, 315n4.

⁴⁰³ Rufus Rockwell Wilson, ed., Uncollected Works of Abraham Lincoln (2 vols.; Elmira, N.Y.: Primavera Press, 1947), 2:162-65; LPAL, case file # 01213; Duff, Prairie Lawyer, 86-87.

fall into error, in deciding in his favor.” A lawyer “who refuses his professional assistance because in his judgment the case is unjust and indefensible, usurps the function of both judge and jury.”⁴⁰⁴ In 1844, the eminent jurist David Dudley Field observed that in the United States it was assumed that “a lawyer is not at liberty to refuse any one his services.”⁴⁰⁵ (In his notes for a law lecture, Lincoln dealt with some ethical issues, but not this one.)⁴⁰⁶

So, despite his antislavery convictions, Lincoln accepted the Matson case in keeping with what became known in England as the “cab-rank” rule – stipulating that lawyers must accept the first client who hails them – and with the prevailing Whig view that lawyers should try to settle disputes in an orderly fashion through the courts, trusting in the law and the judges to assure that justice was done.⁴⁰⁷

A case somewhat similar to Matson’s involved an antislavery editor, Paul Selby, with whom Lincoln worked in 1856 to launch the Illinois Republican party. Three years earlier, Selby was caned in the public square of Jacksonville by Col. James Dunlap, “a very wealthy, aristocratic democrat, one of the chivalry,” who took offense at some editorials Selby had published in his newspaper, the Morgan Journal. Dunlap hired Lincoln, who hardly sympathized with his principles or conduct, to combat the suit of his ideological ally, Selby.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁴ George Sharswood, A Compend of Lectures on the Aims and Duties of the Profession of Law (Philadelphia: Johnson, 1854), 26, quoted in Steiner, An Honest Calling, 133. Several other legal authorities made the same argument. Ibid., 133-36.

⁴⁰⁵ David Dudley Field, “The Study and Practice of the Law,” United States Magazine and Democratic Review 14 (1844): 347-48.

⁴⁰⁶ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:81-82.

⁴⁰⁷ Steiner, An Honest Calling, 136.

⁴⁰⁸ Selby v. Dunlap (1853-54), LPAL, case file # 00871; A[bram] Bergen, “Abraham Lincoln as a Lawyer,” Journal of the American Bar Association 12 (1926): 391-92.

This ideological neutrality characterized Lincoln's law practice in general, not just in slave-related cases. In malpractice suits he would represent doctors and patients alike; he represented railroads being sued by boat owners whose vessels crashed into their bridges and also boat owners suing railroads for obstructing navigation with their bridges; he represented stock subscribers reneging on their pledges and corporations suing such stock subscribers. At least three times he was defeated because of a precedent that he had earlier helped to establish.⁴⁰⁹ On the stump he defended the Whig economic program favoring banks, corporations, and internal improvements like railroads, but in court he showed no hesitancy in representing clients suing those banks, corporations, and railroads.⁴¹⁰

Like other members of the bar, Lincoln could ill afford to be finicky about clients; there were simply too many lawyers and too few clients.⁴¹¹ As a colleague at the bar said of Lincoln, he "was like the rest of us and took the defense of anyone who had a chance with the law."⁴¹² In 1842, Lincoln told Joshua Speed: "I am so poor, and make so little headway in the world, that I drop back in a month of idleness, as much as I gain in a year's sowing."⁴¹³ The following year, he informed Speed that he could not visit Kentucky because of "poverty."⁴¹⁴ Lincoln's friend Leonard Swett recalled that in the 1840s, Lincoln "was poor," and "his ideas of money were always far from lavish. I never

⁴⁰⁹ Dan W. Bannister, Lincoln and the Illinois Supreme Court (Springfield: privately published, 1995), 54.

⁴¹⁰ Mark E. Steiner, "Lawyers and Legal Change in Antebellum America: Learning from Lincoln," University of Detroit Mercy Law Review 74 (1997): 443-64.

⁴¹¹ Duff, A. Lincoln, Prairies Lawyer, 52; Steiner, "Lawyers and Legal Change in Antebellum America: Learning from Lincoln," 459-63.

⁴¹² Reminiscences of George Edmunds, Chicago Journal, 12 February 1909.

⁴¹³ Lincoln to Joshua Speed, Springfield, 4 July 1842, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:289.

⁴¹⁴ Lincoln to Speed, Springfield, 18 May 1843, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:325.

knew him to refuse to spend for anything he needed. Yet he was always rigidly frugal and in no way indulged, in himself or others, idleness or wastefulness.”⁴¹⁵ When another friend, Joseph Gillespie, asked him if he ever invested in land, Lincoln “said he did not think he had much more money making sense than a dumb brute” and therefore never engaged in real estate speculation. According to Gillespie, the only “use Mr Lincoln had for wealth was to enable him to appear respectable. He never hoarded nor wasted but used money as he needed it and gave himself little or no concern about laying it up.”⁴¹⁶ Poor though he was, Lincoln in 1843 forgave a debt owed to him by Isaac Cogdal, who had lost his hand in an accidental explosion. When Cogdal protested, Lincoln replied that “if you had the money, I would not take it.”⁴¹⁷ Sixteen years later he lamented, “It is bad to be poor. I shall go to the wall for bread and meat, if I neglect my business this year as well as last.”⁴¹⁸ Around that time Mary Todd Lincoln confided to her half-sister that as she beheld ships ready to sail for Europe, “I felt inclined to sigh that poverty was my portion.”⁴¹⁹ A fellow Whig campaigner recalled that in 1848 Lincoln “was very poor.”⁴²⁰ Compared with other lawyers in Springfield, Lincoln was not especially prosperous. According to the census of 1860, he ranked twelfth of the seventeen attorneys in terms of assets. (Of the 414 Springfield households listed in the census, the Lincolns’ ranked

⁴¹⁵ Swett to Herndon, Chicago, 15 January 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 159.

⁴¹⁶ Undated memorandum by Gillespie, Gillespie Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield; Gillespie to Herndon, Edwardsville, 31 January 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 181.

⁴¹⁷ Cogdal told this story to Josiah G. Holland. Holland, Life of Lincoln, 93.

⁴¹⁸ Lincoln to Hawkins Taylor, Springfield, 6 September 1859, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:400.

⁴¹⁹ Mary Todd Lincoln to Emilie Todd Helm, Springfield, 20 September [1857], in Turner and Turner, eds., Mary Todd Lincoln, 50.

⁴²⁰ William Pickney Whyte told this story to Allen C. Clark. Clark, Abraham Lincoln in the National Capital (Washington: W. F. Roberts, 1925), 6.

127th.) The five lawyers who owned less than he did – including Herndon – were much younger, averaging thirty-two; Lincoln was then fifty-one.⁴²¹

Lincoln was not the only struggling lawyer. David Davis lamented in 1844 that the “law is not profitable.”⁴²² Five years later, he told Lincoln that the “practice of Law in Illinois at present promises you but poor remuneration for the Labor – Except in the large commercial places in the State, the practice will always be poor.”⁴²³ Davis recalled that when he moved to central Illinois in the 1830s, he had expected to find few attorneys; instead he discovered that the state “was full of able lawyers.”⁴²⁴ An Ohio lawyer complained in 1844 that “great fortunes are not acquired at the bar, and few become rich. . . . Statistics of professional profits would correct many erroneous opinions. They would save many from disappointment and failure. They would show this way of life overstocked by a body of men, ingenious, ambitious, needy, and sometimes unscrupulous. The fees of the profession, equally distributed, would not afford them a decent living. The same industry, learning and abilities, applied to any other employment of life, would yield a much greater return.” The legal profession “has a large number of members in proportion to the business,” and that number was growing rapidly as the “farmer abandons his plough, the tailor his thimble, the clerk his desk, and without study or education, they rush into a profession which is, in their view, the avenue to fame and fortune.”⁴²⁵

⁴²¹ I am deeply grateful to attorney and historian Richard Hart of Springfield, who compiled these data and generously shared them with me.

⁴²² David Davis to William P. Walker, 31 December 1844, in Harry Edward Pratt, “David Davis, 1815-1886” (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1930), 34.

⁴²³ Davis to Lincoln, Bloomington, 21 February 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴²⁴ Davis, speech of 4 July 1881, quoted in Pratt, “David Davis,” 21.

⁴²⁵ F. of Circleville, Ohio, “The Profession of the Law,” Western Law Journal 7 (1849): 110, 111, 98, 103.

Another Ohio lawyer, Salmon P. Chase, viewed slave cases differently from Lincoln. Known as the “Attorney General for Runaway Negroes,” Chase repeatedly represented blacks fleeing from bondage and never defended a slaveholder.⁴²⁶ He became a leader of the more radical political antislavery forces. On the other hand, in 1860 a leading Massachusetts abolitionist, future wartime governor John A. Andrew, defended the owner of a slave ship whose vessel was being threatened with forfeiture.⁴²⁷

Some attorneys who were not dedicated opponents of slavery, like Lincoln’s fellow Whig leader Orville H. Browning, represented fugitive slaves.⁴²⁸ According to his friend John W. Bunn, Lincoln avoided fugitive slave cases “because of his unwillingness to be a party to a violation of the Fugitive Slave Law, arguing that the way to overcome the difficulty was to repeal the law.”⁴²⁹

JOURNEY TO WASHINGTON

In October 1847, Congressman-elect Lincoln rented his Springfield house to Cornelius Ludlum and, with Mary and their children, set out to assume his new post in Washington. En route they spent three weeks with Mary’s family in Kentucky. Robert Smith Todd was positively disposed toward his son-in-law, whom he had visited at Springfield in 1843. Mary “was pleased that her father and Mr. Lincoln liked each other” and she and her husband “promised to seize the first opportunity to come to

⁴²⁶ John Niven, Salmon P. Chase: A Biography (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 78.

⁴²⁷ John M. Hamrogue, “John A. Andrew, Abolitionist Governor, 1861-1865” (Ph.D. dissertation, Fordham University, 1974), 7-8.

⁴²⁸ See Maurice G. Baxter, Orville H. Browning, Lincoln’s Friend and Critic (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1957), 297.

⁴²⁹ John W. Bunn, statement for Jesse W. Weik, in Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 198.

Kentucky.”⁴³⁰ To help the newlyweds out, Todd gave them eighty acres of land near Springfield, provided annual gifts for the remaining six years of his life (totaling over \$1100), and assigned to them notes of various Illinois merchants who owed him money.⁴³¹

In 1844, Robert Smith Todd offered to assist Lincoln politically as well as financially, as he explained to Ninian W. Edwards: “Mr. Lincoln I discover is using his influence & talents for the Whig Cause . . . I can use influence here if Mr Clay is elected (of which there can be no doubt) to procure some appointment for him, which will keep him out of Congress until his Situation in a monied point of view, will enable him to take a stand in Congress, creditable both to himself and Country. Such as District Attorney or Judge.”⁴³² Todd confided to Edwards: “I feel more than grateful that my daughters all have married gentlemen whom I respect and esteem, and I should be pleased if it could ever be in my power to give them a more substantial evidence of my feelings than in mere words or professions. . . . I will be satisfied if they discharge all their duties and make as good wives as I think they have good husbands.”⁴³³

On their circuitous journey to Kentucky, which began October 25, the Lincolns passed the first night in a St. Louis hotel where Joshua Speed, evidently traveling with

⁴³⁰ Manuscript of Helm, Mary, Wife of Lincoln, Townsend Papers, University of Kentucky. This passage was deleted from the published version of the biography.

⁴³¹ William H. Townsend, Lincoln and the Bluegrass: Slavery and Civil War in Kentucky (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1955), 82, 366.

⁴³² Robert Smith Todd to Ninian W. Edwards, Lexington, 13 March 1844, Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 72 (1979): 275.

⁴³³ Todd to Ninian Edwards, December 1844, quoted by Albert S. Edwards, nephew of Mary Todd Lincoln, in Stevens, A Reporter’s Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 118. According to Mary Edwards Brown, this letter was written on 1 December 1846. Mrs. Brown, interviewed by William E. Barton, Springfield, 21 April 1920, Barton Papers, University of Chicago. Mrs. Brown, a granddaughter of Ninian W. Edwards, said that Todd wrote her grandfather: “I only hope that Mary will make as good a wife as she has a husband.” Illinois State Register (Springfield), 4 November 1920.

them, was also a guest.⁴³⁴ They proceeded by boat to Frankfort, where they caught a train for Lexington. On the last leg of their trip, four-year-old Robert and his eighteen-month-old brother Eddie irritated their fellow passengers, including Joseph Humphreys, nephew of Mary Lincoln's stepmother. Young Humphreys, arriving at his aunt's home before the Lincolns, exclaimed: "I was never so glad to get off a train in my life. There were two lively youngsters on board who kept the whole train in a turmoil, and their long-legged father, instead of spanking the brats, looked pleased as Punch and aided and abetted the older one in mischief."⁴³⁵

As this anecdote suggests, Lincoln was notoriously indulgent to his children.⁴³⁶ William Herndon observed that Lincoln was "so blinded to his children's faults" that if "they s[ha]t in Lincoln's hat and rubbed it on his boots, he would have laughed and thought it smart. . . . He worshipped his children and what they worshipped; . . . disliked what the[y] hated, which was everything that did not bend to their . . . whims." Herndon complained that when the boys came to the office with their father, they "would take down the books – empty ash buckets – coal ashes – inkstands – papers – gold pens – letters etc., etc. in a pile and then dance on the pile."⁴³⁷ Many Springfield residents shared Herndon's view that Lincoln "was too kind, too tender & too gentle to his children: he had no domestic government – administration or order." Herndon added that Lincoln "was liberal – generous – affectionate to his children, loving them with his whole heart, .

⁴³⁴ St. Louis Star-Times, 7 September 1934.

⁴³⁵ Helm, Mary, Wife of Lincoln, 101-2. Clement B. White, husband of Mary Lincoln's half-sister Martha, told a similar story, as did the mother of Mary Scott Uda. Chicago Inter-Ocean, 12 February 1899, New York Herald-Tribune, 7 February 1926.

⁴³⁶ See Burlingame, Inner World of Lincoln, 57-72.

⁴³⁷ Herndon to Jesse Weik, Springfield, 18 February 1887, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

. . . as loving & tender as a nursing mother.”⁴³⁸ Mary Lincoln recalled her husband’s statement about child rearing: “It [is my] pleasure that my children are free – happy & unrestrained by parental tyranny. Love is the chain whereby to Lock a child to its parents.”⁴³⁹ A Springfield neighbor described a meal she attended at the Lincoln house: “Mr. Lincoln was carving the chicken, and the first thing he did was to cut off the drumstick and gave it to Tad . . . , and then he said, smiling at the rest of the company, ‘Children have first place here, you know.’”⁴⁴⁰

Arriving at the Todd house shortly after the irate Joseph Humphreys, the Lincolns were warmly received. During this vacation, Lincoln spent much time reading periodicals like Niles Register and a poetry anthology, which contained William Cullen Bryant’s “Thanatopsis.” He committed Bryant’s poem to memory.⁴⁴¹ In that volume, titled Elegant Extracts, or Useful and Entertaining Passages from the Best English Authors and Translations, Lincoln marked with a pencil some verses, including Pope’s couplet,

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;

The Proper study of Mankind is man.

He scribbled marginalia next to these lines from “The Grave,” by John Blair:

The last end

Of the good man is peace. How calm his exit.

⁴³⁸ William Henry Herndon, “Analysis of the Character of Abraham Lincoln” (lecture of 26 December 1865), Abraham Lincoln Quarterly 1 (1941): 417-18; Ruth Painter Randall, Lincoln’s Sons (Boston: Little, Brown, 1955), 36-48.

⁴³⁹ Mary Todd Lincoln, interview with Herndon, [September 1866], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 359.

⁴⁴⁰ Reminiscences of Annie Lanphier Walters, Chicago Examiner, 13 February 1909. Born in Washington, D.C., in 1835, Walters was the daughter of Ann Ideall Lanphier (1809-1902) and William Walters (1802-46), the hard-drinking state printer and publisher of the Illinois State Register. Her family lived in the same block as the Lincolns, across the street at the intersection of Eighth and Market (later renamed Capitol) Streets, from 1839 till 1864.

⁴⁴¹ Emilie Todd Helm, in Helm, Mary, Wife of Lincoln, 99-101.

Night dews fall not more gently to the ground,
Nor weary, worn-out winds expire so soft.

Lincoln might have been thinking of his wife when he marked this passage from “Love of Fame”:

A dearth of words, a woman need not fear;
But ’tis a task indeed to learn to hear.
Doubly like Echo sound is her delight,
And the last word is her eternal right.
Is’t not enough plagues, wars and famines rise
To lash our crimes, but must our wives be wise?⁴⁴²

Lincoln was so impressed with Cowper’s poem “Charity,” dealing with slavery and the slave trade, that “he bracketed and even turned down the page upon which it appeared.” He marked the following verses:

Oh that the voice of clamor & debate
That pleads for peace ’til it disturbs the State
Were hushed in favor of thy generous plea,
The poor thy clients, and heaven’s smile thy fee.⁴⁴³

From the same poem he also made notations beside these lines:

But Ah! What wish can prosper, or what prayer
For merchants rich in cargoes of despair,
Who drive a loathsome traffic, gauge and span,

⁴⁴² Townsend, Lincoln and the Bluegrass, 136-37.

⁴⁴³ Emilie Todd Helm, in Helm, Mary, Wife of Lincoln, 101; William E. Barton, memorandum of a conversation with Emilie Todd Helm, 6 March 1921, William H. Townsend Papers, University of Kentucky, Lexington.

And buy the muscles and the bones of man?

The tender ties of father, husband, friend,

All bonds of nature in that moment end;

And each endures, while yet he draws breath,

A stroke as fatal as the scythe of death.⁴⁴⁴

In the Lexington newspapers Lincoln perhaps read advertisements like this one placed by a slave dealer: “Those who have slaves rendered unfit for labor by Yaws, Scrofula, Chronic Diarrhea, Negro Consumption, Rheumatism &c, and who wish to dispose of them on reasonable terms will address J. King, No. 29 Camp St., New Orleans.”⁴⁴⁵ His in-laws may have explained to Lincoln that in Louisiana, some plantations of absentee owners were run by overseers who deliberately worked to death such diseased slaves, whom they bought cheap. The future president may also have heard about the notoriously ill-tempered Caroline A. Turner, who savagely mistreated her slaves, killing half a dozen before one turned on her and strangled her to death.⁴⁴⁶

In Lexington, Lincoln could observe slavery as well as read and hear about it. He doubtless saw the public square, with its slave auction block and whipping post, where, according to one visitor, “incorrigible or delinquent negroes are flogged unmercifully. I saw this punishment inflicted on two of these wretches. Their screams soon collected a numerous crowd.” Lincoln may have watched coffles file by the Todd house. (Lexington was the state’s principal slave market.) The noisome holding pens of a slave dealer

⁴⁴⁴ Townsend, Lincoln and the Bluegrass, 136.

⁴⁴⁵ Lexington Observer & Reporter, 3 November 1847, in Townsend, Lincoln and the Bluegrass, 129. See also J. Winston Coleman, Slavery Times in Kentucky (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1940), 188-89.

⁴⁴⁶ Townsend, Lincoln and the Bluegrass, 129, 74; Coleman, Slavery Times in Kentucky, 249-51.

practically abutted the home of Mary Lincoln's grandmother, the redoubtable Elizabeth R. Parker. Lincoln perhaps witnessed auctions there or at the public square, where one was held in mid-November, when a man sold five of his slaves to satisfy a judgment obtained against him by Robert Smith Todd.⁴⁴⁷

From his wife's older relatives, Lincoln probably heard stories about his own kin, including his great-uncle, Thomas Lincoln, who had settled a few miles outside Lexington and prospered until his marriage to a physically abusive wife ended in divorce.⁴⁴⁸ (Lincoln may have derived some comfort from the knowledge that he was not the only man in the family with a violent spouse.)

On November 13, Lincoln heard Henry Clay launch his fourth attempt to win the presidency with a speech about James K. Polk's actions precipitating the war with Mexico, a conflict still officially underway at the time.⁴⁴⁹ "This is no war of defence," Clay charged, "but one unnecessary and of offensive aggression. It is Mexico that is defending her fire-sides, her castles and her altars, not we." Plaintively he asked: "Must we blindly continue the conflict, without any visible object, or any prospect of a definite termination?" He declared that all nations "look upon us, in the prosecution of the present war, as being actuated by a spirit of rapacity, and an inordinate desire for territorial aggrandizement." He emphatically opposed the extension slavery into any territory acquired from Mexico: "I have ever regarded slavery as a great evil, a wrong, for the

⁴⁴⁷ Townsend, Lincoln and the Bluegrass, 73, 129-30, 132; Coleman, Slavery Times in Kentucky, 148, 156-66.

⁴⁴⁸ Lincoln to Jesse Lincoln, 1 April 1854, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:217-18; Townsend, Lincoln and the Bluegrass, 16-24.

⁴⁴⁹ Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 279.

present, I fear, an irremediable wrong to its unfortunate victims. I should rejoice if not a single slave breathed the air or was within the limits of our country.”⁴⁵⁰

With these words ringing in his ears, Lincoln soon left Kentucky to take his seat in Congress, where he would denounce President Polk’s Mexican war policy and try to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia. Accompanying him was his wife, who wished “to loom largely” at the nation’s capital.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁵⁰ Clay, speech in Lexington, 13 November 1847, Robert Seager and James F. Hopkins eds., The Papers of Henry Clay (10 vols.; Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1959-91), 10:364, 370-71, 372. According to Usher F. Linder, “Clay had written his speech and read it to the audience – a very unusual thing for him – and its delivery did not come up to Mr. Lincoln’s expectations.” Linder’s statement for J. G. Holland, 1865, copy, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁵¹ David Davis to his wife, Springfield, 8 August 1847, David Davis Papers, Chicago History Museum.