

Abraham Lincoln Speaking in Lincoln, IL

Oct. 16, 1858 (co-authored by Ron Keller)

[taken from: **ABRAHAM LINCOLN IN LOGAN COUNTY, ILLINOIS**; pp 98 – 102]

BY PAUL J. BEAVER



“Lincoln in Lincoln” painting by Jennifer Boeke
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To lose this important area of central Illinois, which included his home in Springfield and his namesake city of Lincoln, would prove to be an embarrassment and a possible hindrance to a further political future. Thus, on October 16, 1858, the day following the last debate in Alton, Lincoln began the homestretch of his campaign in his namesake city.

Parks promised to give Lincoln “a big time” when he came back to Lincoln, Illinois. As it turned out, it was indeed a grand affair—a big time indeed, and much larger than even Parks imagined. An estimated crowd of 5,000 people packed the Logan County Courthouse square, dwarfing the size of the crowd that had assembled to hear Douglas weeks before. It was, according to the *Chicago Tribune*, “far beyond any thing that ever transpired in this part of the state.” Cannons welcomed the arrival of “Old Abe,” and as he walked from the train station to a platform on the west side of the courthouse, very loud and hearty cheers greeted him along the way. Delegations from Atlanta, Middletown, Sugar Creek, Lake Fork, Salt Creek, Elkhart, and Mt. Pulaski, arrived by train and by horse. Some 50 wagons came from Mt. Pulaski alone. Even folks from Springfield and Bloomington came to welcome him. Evidencing the support of recent immigrants to the area, a delegation of Germans carried a banner proclaiming, “Abe Lincoln, the choice of the Germans.”ⁱ

Speaking from the outside of the west side of the Logan County Courthouse, Samuel Parks, the man from Logan County who had once before labored to obtain a Senate position for Lincoln, fittingly introduced him. Lincoln then spoke for two hours to the multitude pinpointing the fallacies in Douglas's words and actions. The *Illinois State Journal* reported that "his speech was one of the best he ever made and the enthusiasm of his hearers was unbounded."ⁱⁱ

All said and done, it was, noted the *Journal*, "one of the largest and most enthusiastic meetings of the campaign." The *Tribune* was correct to write, "Abe Lincoln has just closed one of his noblest efforts here. This is a glorious day for little Logan."ⁱⁱⁱ While exact numbers on the crowd attendance were rarely recorded, there is reason to believe that the 5,000 at the mass rally in Lincoln, Illinois, was perhaps the largest crowd for Abraham Lincoln singularly, at any point and time until he was elected president.

Charles Forsyth of Lincoln, Illinois, was among the throngs of people who heard Lincoln on that October day. He later relayed:

I wish I could describe Lincoln's voice. When I heard Mr. Lincoln speak at Lincoln there was an immense crowd. The entire square was filled with people. The stores and other buildings on the four streets around the square were covered with a dense crowd. I went early and took up my position in front of the speakers' stand, about forty feet from the speaker. But I hear men who were on the roofs of the buildings after the speech say that they heard every word. His voice had wonderful carrying powers, and the burden of his speech was opposition to extending slavery into the territories. Referring to Mr. Lincoln's style of oratory, it should be classed as a purely oratorical style. It was neither dramatic nor conversational.^{iv}

Lincoln possessed many qualities and skills necessary for a successful politician of the time. He had an uncanny ability to relate to people's various situations and a desire to get to know them personally. His arguments appealed to logic and reason. His overall temperament, sense of humor, and avoidance of grudges, allowed enemies at bay to eventually warm to him. Lincoln developed a political savvy; but, his political success he also worked hard for. Forsyth remembered meeting Abraham Lincoln several times in Lincoln, Illinois, and noted that Lincoln's demeanor was a secret to his success. Forsyth observed:

Personally, all who knew Mr. Lincoln liked him. Those whom he well knew he often called by their given names, and they called him, 'Abe.' He was a man whom to know was to trust. I heard a Democrat who shook hands with him when he was running for United States Senator say, 'I like you Abe, all but your politics.' Lincoln laughed good-naturedly and said, 'Oh Jimmie, you'll vote for me some day!' And Jimmie did.^v

Parks, who worked alongside Lincoln on many different occasions and purposes, echoed sentiments of Forsyth. He, as much as any other, had the opportunity to observe Abraham Lincoln in various situations. Parks concluded:

The great feature in Mr. Lincoln's character was his integrity in the longest sense of that term—his devotion to truth, justice, & freedom in every department of human life & under every temptation. I have often said that for a man who was for the quarter of a century both a lawyer & a politician he was the most honest man I ever knew. He was not only morally honest but intellectually so—he could not reason falsely—if he attempted it he failed. In politics he never would try to mislead.^{vi}

Following the October 16 rally, the *Chicago Tribune* predicted that the battleground of central Illinois would go to Lincoln. “Logan County will give Walker [the Republican candidate for Congress] 250 or 300 majority... They need not talk about this district being one of the doubtful ones.” The paper then went on to predict that Logan County was as solid in the Republican category as Cook County.^{vii}

But, was the *Tribune* as a Republican Party organ, being overly optimistic? Just as in the 1855 Senate race, the Illinois House and Senate—not the popular vote—decided the outcome that mattered. In the end, Lincoln prevailed in the popular vote in the state. However, due to legislative districts drawn eight years earlier when the state’s population demographics were significantly different, the state legislature favored Douglas. The Democrats took 40 to Lincoln’s 35 State House members, and won 14 to 11 in the State Senate. That obviously meant that Douglas would be elected senator. Parks and Davis had been correct in believing that the central counties were very much in play. The east-central counties in the state went Republican in the House, the western half went Democrat. As with his run for Congress a little over ten years earlier, Lincoln failed to carry his home county of Sangamon.

¹ “Mr. Lincoln in Logan County,” in the *Chicago Tribune*, October 18, 1858, and “Great Meeting at Lincoln” in the *Illinois State Journal*, October 18, 1858.

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