(Another witness recalled Lincoln’s words slightly differently: “My old friend here, John Hanks, will remember I used to shirk splitting all the hard cuts. But if those two are honey locust rails, I have no doubt I cut and split them.”)\(^1\) Once again the crowd cheered Lincoln, whose sobriquet “the rail-splitter” was born that day.\(^2\)

According to Noah Brooks, Lincoln “was not greatly pleased with the rail incident,” for he disapproved of “stage tricks.”\(^3\) Still, Lincoln was rather proud of his rail-splitting talent. Brooks reported that while visiting Union troops at the front in 1863, Lincoln noticed trees that they had chopped down. Scrutinizing the stumps, he said: “That’s a good job of felling; they have got some good axemen in this army, I see.” When Brooks asked about his expertise in rail splitting, the president replied: “I am not a bit anxious about my reputation in that line of business; but if there is any thing in this world that I am a judge of, it is of good felling of timber.” He “explained minutely how a good job differed from a poor one, giving illustrations from the ugly stumps on either side.”\(^4\)

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