

Journal Divided – “Railsplitter”

Excerpt from Chapter 14 of Michael Burlingame’s *Abraham Lincoln: A Life* (pgs 1633-1637)

Link to full Chapter Fourteen

<http://www.knox.edu/documents/pdfs/LincolnStudies/Burlingame,%20Vol%201,%20Chap%2014.pdf>

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Shortly after the convention opened, the “tall, massive, handsome” Richard J. Oglesby, a rising political star from Decatur who would eventually be elected governor of Illinois three times as well as U.S. senator, interrupted the proceedings by announcing: “I am informed that a distinguished citizen of Illinois, and one of whom Illinois ever delight to honor, is present, and I wish to move that this body invite him to a seat on the stand.” The 3000 auditors in the makeshift 900-seat convention center impatiently waited for this man to be identified. Oglesby, “as if knowing that an outburst would follow . . . seemed purposely to delay mentioning any name, as if to tease expectation to the verge of desperation.” When he finally shouted, “Abraham Lincoln,” the crowd roared its approval and tried to jam Lincoln, who had been sitting in the rear of the hall, through the densely packed crowd to the stage. Frustrated by their failure to penetrate the throng, they hoisted him up and passed him “kicking scrambling – crawling – upon the sea of heads between him and the Stand.” When he reached that destination, half a dozen delegates set him upright. “The cheering,” reported an observer, “was like the roar of the sea. Hats were thrown up by the Chicago delegation, as if hats were no longer useful.” Lincoln, who “rose bowing and blushing,” appeared to be “one of the most diffident and worst plagued men I ever saw.” With a smile, he thanked the crowd for its expression of esteem.¹

¹ Indianapolis correspondence by Charles A. Page, 30 April 1865, in Charles A. Page, *Letters of a War Correspondent*, ed. James R. Gilmore (Boston: L. C. Page, 1899), 376; Mark A. Plummer, *Lincoln’s Rail-Splitter: Governor Richard J. Oglesby* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 41-42; _____ Johnson to William Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., *Herndon’s Informants*, 462-63; “Viator” to the editors, Decatur, 4 May, *Illinois State Journal* (Springfield), 7 May 1860. See also Jewell H. Aubere, “A Reminiscence of Abraham Lincoln: A Conversation with Speaker [Joseph] Cannon,” *World’s Work* 13 (1907): 8528-29.