

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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After the aspirants for governor had been placed in nomination but before the voting began (which saw Yates defeat Swett and Judd), Oglesby once again interrupted, announcing that “an old Democrat of Macon county . . . desired to make a contribution to the Convention.” The crowd yelled, “Receive it!” Thereupon Lincoln’s second cousin, John Hanks, accompanied by his friend Isaac D. Jennings, entered the hall bearing two fence rails along with a placard identifying them thus: “Abraham Lincoln, The Rail Candidate for President in 1860. Two rails from a lot of 3,000 made in 1830 by Thos. Hanks and Abe Lincoln – whose father was the first pioneer of Macon County.” (The sign painter was wrong about Hanks’s first name and about Thomas Lincoln’s status as an early settler in Illinois.) Oglesby’s carefully staged theatrical gesture, conjuring up images of the 1840 log-cabin-and-cider campaign, electrified the crowd. “One spontaneous burst of applause went up from all parts of the ‘wigwam,’ which grew more and more deafening as it was prolonged, and which did not wholly subside for ten or fifteen minutes after,” according to a journalist. “The cheers upon cheers which rent the air could have been heard all over the adjacent county.” In response to those thunderous outbursts and calls of “Lincoln,” the candidate-to-be rose, “looking a little sheepish,” examined the rails, then told the crowd: “Well, gentlemen, I must confess I do not understand this: I don’t think I know any more about it than you do.” He added jocularly that the rails may have been hewn by him, “but whether they were or not, he had mauled many and many better ones since he had grown to manhood.”¹

¹ _____ Johnson to William H. Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, ed., *Herndon’s Informants*, 462-63; *Illinois State Journal* (Springfield), 11 May 1860; Henry Asbury to K. K. Jones, Quincy, Illinois, 2 October 1882, copy, files of the Abraham Lincoln Association, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield; Plummer, Oglesby, 42; statement given by Oglesby to J. McCan Davis, 1899, in Davis, *How Abraham Lincoln Became President* (Springfield: Illinois Co., 1909), 55-59; J. McCan Davis, “Origin of the Lincoln Rails as Related by Governor Oglesby,” *Century Illustrated Magazine* 60 (June 1900): 271-75; Wayne C. Temple, *Lincoln the Railsplitter* (La Crosse, Wisconsin: Willow Press, 1961), 7-12.