



## Journal Divided – “Lincoln and Know Nothings”

Excerpt from Chapter 16 of Michael Burlingame’s *Abraham Lincoln: A Life* (pgs 1784-1789)

### Link to full Chapter Sixteen

<http://www.knox.edu/documents/pdfs/LincolnStudies/Burlingame,%20Vol%201,%20Chap%2016.pdf>

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In July, when Thompson expressed a wish to meet with Lincoln, the candidate hesitated.<sup>1</sup> Because Democratic papers had been accusing him of nativist proclivities (even alleging that he had attended a Know Nothing lodge), he wished to do nothing that might lend credence to those false charges.<sup>2</sup> So rather than invite Thompson to Springfield, he dispatched Nicolay to Indiana with instructions to ask what his old friend wanted to discuss and to assure him that his motto was “Fairness to all,” but to make no commitments. In mid-July Nicolay carried out this mission, finding that Thompson “only sought to be assured of the general ‘fairness’ to all elements giving Mr Lincoln their support, and that he did not even hint at any exaction or promise as being necessary to secure the ‘Know Nothing’ vote for the Republican ticket.”<sup>3</sup> Fearing the influence of Know Nothings in northern Illinois, Lincoln asked Thompson to write to John Wilson, an American party leader in Chicago who had been a delegate to the Constitutional Union party’s convention.<sup>4</sup> Thompson complied, and Wilson abandoned the Bell movement after its Illinois leaders tried to merge with the Douglasites. Davis urged Lincoln to cultivate Wilson, which he did, making sure that the Chicagoan was invited to speak at a major Republican rally in Springfield.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thompson to Lincoln, Terre Haute, Indiana, 6 July 1860, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>2</sup> Lincoln to Abraham Jonas, Springfield, 21 July 1860, Basler, ed., *Collected Works of Lincoln*, 4:85-86.

<sup>3</sup> Nicolay, “Lincoln in the Campaign of 1860,” 93-95.

<sup>4</sup> David Davis to Lincoln, Bloomington, 7 June 1860, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Lincoln to Thompson, Springfield, 10 July 1860, Basler, ed., *Collected Works of Lincoln*, 82-83.

<sup>5</sup> Davis to Lincoln, Bloomington, 24 July 1860, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Lincoln to Davis, 27 July 1860, Basler and Basler, eds., *Collected Works of Lincoln, Second Supplement*, 57; Wilson’s speech at Springfield, 8 August 1860, *Illinois State Journal* (Springfield), 15 August 1860.