

# “OLD ABE” PASSES THROUGH NEW JERSEY

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THE fame of Lincoln is now fully enshrined in the hearts of all Jerseymen. But there existed no such unity of sentiment among those of our forefathers who were contemporaries of the “Great Emancipator.” The Democratic party dominated the State Legislature from 1860 to 1865, and, some maintained, the “Locos” themselves were but the paid agents and willing lackeys of the Camden and Amboy railroad monopoly.<sup>1</sup>

The war-time President’s aims were questioned constantly, as were the means which he employed to attain them. We have but to note one partisan act of the Democratic Assembly of 1865 in this connection. On April 4th of that year, the following resolution was introduced in that body:

Whereas, We have the information of the news of the capture and occupation of Richmond, the rebel capital this morning, by the Union army and the total rout of the rebel army at Petersburg,

Therefore Resolved, That the thanks of the Legislature of New Jersey are due and are hereby extended to Abraham Lincoln, Commander-in-Chief, to Lieut. General Grant, Commander of the Union forces, and the gallant soldiers of the armies of the Republic, who have so nobly vindicated and maintained the dignity of our national arms.<sup>2</sup>

Bernard Kearney, Essex Democrat, moved to insert the name of the “noble General Sherman,” and it was done accordingly. “Mr. Leon Abbet, (Democrat, of Hudson) then moved to strike out the name of Abraham Lincoln. He did not think that Mr. Lincoln had

<sup>1</sup> See Wheaton J. Lane, *From Indian Trail to Iron Horse, a History of Travel and Transportation in New Jersey, 1620-1860*, Princeton, 1940. pp. 278-319.

<sup>2</sup> *Newark Sentinel of Freedom*, April 11, 1865.

anything to do with it. He believed he was rather an impediment to the war, and but for him it would have been closed long ago. The question was taken, the clerk having read it with the words ‘commander-in-chief’ also stricken out, and the name was stricken out, 27 to 20, the speaker (Joseph T. Crowell, Union County Republican) voting in the affirmative.”<sup>3</sup>

We would be remiss however, if we failed to record that there was a very vocal and viable Republican minority in the State. New Jersey’s governor from 1860 to 1863, Charles S. Olden, was himself a member of the newer party.<sup>4</sup> Though New Jersey did not give Lincoln its whole-hearted electoral support in either 1860 or 1864, (the only northern state not to do so), certain enthusiastic *devotees* of “Old Abe” hailed his first victory, and his triumphal trek from Springfield to Washington in February of 1861 was faithfully followed in the joyous journals of Jersey Republicans.<sup>5</sup>

In no newspaper was the President-elect’s itinerary more carefully catalogued than in *The Daily Fredonian* of New Brunswick. It accompanied him from Springfield to Washington. The *Fredonian* was helping to initiate the Lincoln legend in New Jersey, as it recorded that:

at Rochester, Pennsylvania. . . a long lean Buckeye came up to the [President’s] car and said he wanted to see “the old Railsplitter”; he said he had split rails too, and he was taller than Old Abe. His remarks caused considerable merriment among the crowd. Mr. Lincoln came out on the platform and “measured with him.” His Excellency came out over an inch ahead, and three cheers were accordingly given for Old Abe, who returned in triumph to the car.<sup>6</sup>

*The Fredonian* mocked two other Jersey papers, and as Lincoln entered New York on February 20th, it remarked:

The secession organs don’t like Uncle Abe’s speeches—they smack too strong of the sterner stuff to suit them, and they are wonderfully afraid he has resolved to punish the traitors that now infest the country, and will enforce the laws to the very letter. The Newark secession organ [*The Newark Daily News*] thinks they are calculated to strengthen the Republicans in the Peace Congress, “and will prevent them from knocking under to the submissionists and agreeing to the Breckinridge Platform there put forth by niggerdom as the only thing which will satisfy the South. The Jersey City secession organ

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *New Jersey Journal* (Elizabeth), Nov. 15, 1859.

<sup>5</sup> *New Brunswick Daily Fredonian*, Feb. 12-Mar. 5, 1861.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 18, 1861.

[*Jersey City Standard*] don't like their style, and says they are not elegant enough to suit its delicate *standard*"; but are "bold, jejune, ungraceful, not to say ungrammatical, with a constant tendency to a coarse and unrefined jocularity, and with little that is agreeable to contemplate in them." Poor Abe, how will he be able to survive these criticisms? And how will he dare to land at Jersey City, right under the shadow of this great luminary who knows more about refinement, true eloquence and statesmanship than all the Presidents from Washington down to Uncle Jimmy?<sup>7</sup>

But Lincoln dared cross the Rubicon (i.e. the Hudson). Furthermore, his Jersey junket of February 21, 1861, proved to be a modest success. The Lincolns left the Astor House, New York, took the New Jersey Railroad ferry to Jersey City, and were received pleasantly in that even then heavily Democratic stronghold.

The entrance of Mr. Lincoln was the signal for loud and enthusiastic cheering. After the President spoke very briefly, there followed a rush to shake hands with Mr. Lincoln, and in the rush and crush the policemen and reporters were nearly annihilated. Old Abe's good nature was successfully prevailed upon again, and he responded a second time: "There appears to be a desire to see more of me, and I can only say that from my position, especially when I look around the gallery (bowing to the ladies), I feel that I have decidedly the best of the bargain, and in this matter I am for no compromises here."<sup>8</sup>

Leaving Jersey City in a special train of the New Jersey Railroad, the party proceeded to Newark. Here a gala reception greeted the distinguished visitor.

After a few words from Lincoln, the Presidential party, with the escort of about 75 citizens on horseback, under Marshal [A. L.] Dennis, proceeded through Broad Street to the Chestnut Street depot. Patriotic manifestations were abundant. The show of white handkerchiefs waving from fair hands was extensive indeed.

The next stop made by the President's train was at Elizabeth. The famous traveler bowed to the assembled crowd, and the elaborately decorated cars swept on to New Brunswick, where the arrival of the train was greeted by a National Salute of thirty-four guns. The local citizens had been congregating for some two hours when the locomotive (Governor Pennington) steamed into the city.

When the train passed so that the rear platform of the last car just crossed George Street, it stopped, and Mr. Lincoln was briefly introduced from the

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 21, 1861.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 22, 1861. The remainder of this article is either quoted or paraphrased from the *Daily Fredonian* of this same date.

rear platform by the Honorable John VanDyke. Mr. Lincoln insisted that he had merely stopped to say "Good Morning" to the happy Brunswickers.

The next and last leg on his Jersey jaunt took the President-elect to the State Capitol at Trenton, where he addressed (separately) the Senate and Assembly. He told the latter body that:

The man does not live in the United States of America who is at heart more devoted to peace and harmony than I am, and that spirit is sure to mark, to the gretest extent possible, the position I shall take.

Nevertheless, the note of firmness in his speech was unmistakable, as is indicated by the following passage:

"And, gentlemen," he asked the Assemblymen, "if you think I am right, you will stand by me, wont you? (Cries of 'We will—we will'). That is all I ask, and if, as I have already suggested, the majority of the Legislature do not agree with me in sentiment, we will try and save the ship for this voyage; and the next time it may be hoped that even in your judgment a better pilot may be chosen in my place."

At 2:30 in the afternoon of the same day, Lincoln left Trenton on the Camden and Amboy Railroad, pausing at Philadelphia before passing on to Washington to keep his date with destiny.

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#### ABRAHAM BLAUVELT

Donald A. Sinclair, of the library staff, and George C. Rockefeller are engaged on a work on Abraham Blauvelt, Rutgers graduate class of 1789, and New Brunswick printer between 1789 and 1816. In addition to Blauvelt's career as printer he served as trustee of Queen's and was responsible for the erection of Queen's Hall. The Library has his manuscript accounts for the erection of the building and many of the books and pamphlets which he printed.

Of the newspapers which Blauvelt published between 1789 and 1816, the Library has a file consisting of: *The Brunswick Gazette*, August 17, 1790 to May 10, 1791; *The Guardian or New Brunswick Advertiser*, November 7, 1792 to October 23, 1798, and November 5, 1801 to November 26, 1807. This leaves gaps between October 1798 and November 1801, and between November 1807 and April 1816, of which we have only a few scattered issues.

If any Friend of Rutgers Library can add to our collection of these early New Brunswick newspapers it will be appreciated.