The Centennial of Lincoln's Visit to Kansas

I. Introduction

The visit of Abraham Lincoln to northeast Kansas 100 years ago was re-enacted December 5, 1959, as a preliminary to the celebration of the state centennial in 1961. Although Lincoln spent seven days (November 30-December 7) on his Kansas speaking tour of 1859, the 1959 re-enactment was accomplished in several hours by motor car.

Commemoration of the Lincoln tour, under the sponsorship of the Kansas Centennial Commission and the State Historical Society, was proposed by Fred W. Brinkerhoff, editor of the Pittsburg Headlight and Sun, a director of the commission and former president of the Society. Rolla Clymer, editor of the El Dorado Times, also a director of the commission and former president of the Society, was cast in the role of the Illinois statesman. Marshall Gardiner of Leavenworth, Al Bennett of Atchison, and C. C. Calnan of Troy, assisted by other citizens and officials, planned the programs and parades along the way.

The caravan traveled from St. Joseph, Mo., through Elwood to Troy, Atchison, and Leavenworth. Stops for speeches were made at the latter three cities—from steps of the courthouses in Troy and Atchison, and from a platform in a downtown street at Leavenworth, near the site of old Stockton hall where Lincoln gave two of his speeches. The weather was cold in 1959, but not as cold as when Lincoln huddled under a buffalo robe in an open buggy 100 years earlier. This buggy, used by Lincoln on part of his Kansas journey, is now the property of the Fort Leavenworth museum and was transported on a truck-drawn trailer. The 1959 Lincoln made entrances into some of the towns in this authentic but now horseless carriage.

Clymer's talks included words and phrases of the Lincoln speeches as reported in contemporary newspapers and in Roy P. Basler's Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln (Rutgers University Press, 1953). With these, Clymer reconstructed the political scene of 1859 and gave the essence of what Lincoln, who the next year was to announce himself a candidate and to win the Presidency, may have said in several long speeches in these Kansas cities.

(438)
II. ROLLA CLYMER'S 1959 PRESENTATION OF LINCOLN'S SPEECHES IN KANSAS

TROY

This is the first time I have set foot on Kansas soil, and I am glad to be here. It is possible that you people of Kansas have local questions with regard to Railroads, Land Grants and internal improvements—which are matters of deeper interest to you than the questions arising out of national politics. Of these I know nothing, and can say nothing.

You have, however, just adopted a state constitution and it is probable that, under that Constitution, you will soon cease your territorial existence and come forward to take your place in the brotherhood of states, and act your part as a member of the confederation.

Kansas will be free, but the same questions aroused here in regard to freedom or slavery will arise with regard to other territories—and Kansas will have to take a stand in deciding them.

People often ask: "Why make such a fuss about a few Negroes?" I answer the question by asking, what will you do to dispose of this question? The slaves constitute one-seventh of our entire population. Wherever there is an element of this magnitude in government, it will be talked about.

The general feeling in regard to slavery has changed entirely since the early days of the Republic. You may examine the debates under the Confederation, in the convention that framed the constitution, and in the first session of Congress—and you will not find a single man saying Slavery is a good thing. They all believed it was an evil.

They made the Northwest Territory—the only territory then belonging to the government—forever Free. They prohibited the African slave trade. Having thus prevented its extension and cut off the supply, the Fathers of the Republic believed that Slavery must soon disappear.

There are only three clauses in the Constitution which refer to Slavery, and in neither of them is the word Slave or Slavery mentioned. The word is not used in the clause prohibiting the African slave trade; it is not used in the clause which makes Slaves a basis of representation; it is not used in the clause requiring the return of fugitive Slaves.

And yet in all the debates in the Convention the question was discussed and Slaves and Slavery talked about. Now why was this word kept out of this instrument and so carefully kept that a European, be he ever so intelligent, if not familiar with our institutions, might read the Constitution over and over again and never learn that Slavery existed in the United States?

The reason is this: The Framers of the Organic Law believed that the Constitution would outlast Slavery, and they did not want a word there to tell future generations that Slavery had ever been legalized in America.

Tomorrow John Brown will be hanged for treason in Virginia. We are forced to believe that the attack of Brown on Harpers Ferry was wrong for two reasons: It was a violation of law; and it was, as all such attacks must be, futile as far as any effect it might have on the extinction of a great evil.

We have provided a means for the expression of our belief in regard to slavery—and that is through the ballot box—the peaceful method provided by the Constitution. John Brown has shown great courage, rare unselfishness, as
even Governor Wise testifies. But no man, North or South, can approve of violence or crime.

And now I thank you, and extend the wish that all of you go to your own state election on Tuesday and vote as becomes the Free Men of Kansas.

ATCHISON

You are, as yet, the people of a territory, but you probably soon will be the people of a state of the union.

Then you will be in possession of new privileges—and new duties will be upon you. You will have to bear a part in all that appertains to the administration of the national government.

That government, from the beginning, has had, has now, and must continue to have a policy in relation to domestic slavery. It cannot, if it would, be without a policy upon that subject.

And that policy must, of necessity, take one of two directions. It must deal with the institution as being wrong, or not being wrong.

The nationality of Freedom is as old as the government itself. In all states where slavery did not exist by municipal law, or was not made a distinctive feature of the articles of cession, Freedom was established.

The Fathers opposed interfering with slavery where it existed, or allowing it to encompass the national domain. That is alike my doctrine, and the doctrine of the Republican party.

We hear much today about the doctrine of Popular Sovereignty. If you carry out that doctrine to its full meaning, it would renew the African slave trade.

Who can show that one people have a better right to carry slaves to where they never have been, than another people to buy slaves wherever they please, even in Africa?

The advocates of Popular Sovereignty by their efforts to brutalize the Negro in the public mind—denying him any share in the Declaration of Independence, and comparing him to the crocodile—are beyond what avowed pro-slavery men ever do. These people do as much, or more, as the pro-slavery men toward making the institution national and perpetual.

Many of these Popular Sovereignty advocates say they are “as much opposed to slavery as anyone,” but they never seem to find any time or place to oppose it.

In their view, it must not be opposed to politics, because that is agitation; nor in the pulpit, because that is religion: nor in the Free States because it is not there; nor in the slave states because it is there.

These gentleman are never offended by hearing slavery supported in any of these places. Still, they are “as much opposed to slavery as anybody.” One would suppose that it would exactly suit them if the people of the slave states themselves would adopt emancipation.

But when Frank Blair tried this last year in Missouri, and was beaten, everyone of them threw up his hat and shouted, “Hurrah for Democracy.”

Your territory has had a marked history. No territory has ever had such a history. There has been strife and bloodshed here. Both parties have been guilty of outrages.
Lincoln’s Visit to Kansas

Whatever the relative guilt of the parties, one fact is certain—that there has been loss of life, destruction of property and material interests have been retarded.

Can anyone say this has been desirable?

There is a peaceful way of settling these questions—the way adopted by government until a recent period. The bloody code has grown out of the new policy in regard to the government of territories.

We have a means provided for the expression of our belief in regard to slavery—through the ballot box—as the peaceful method provided by the constitution.

You who object to Republicans say you are for the Union, and you greatly fear the success of the Republicans would destroy the Union. Why?

Do the Republicans declare against the Union? Nothing like it. Your own statement is that if the Black Republicans elect a president, you won’t stand it. You will break up the Union.

That will be your act, not ours. To justify it, you must show that our policy gives you just cause for such desperate action. Can you do that?

When you attempt it, you will find that our policy is exactly the policy of the men who made the Union. Nothing more and nothing less.

While you elect a president, we submit—neither breaking nor attempting to break up the Union. If we shall constitutionally elect a president, it will be our duty to see that you submit.

Old John Brown has just been executed for treason against a state. We cannot object, even though he agreed with us in thinking slavery wrong. That cannot excuse violence, bloodshed and treason. It could avail him nothing that he might think himself right.

So, if we constitutionally elect a President, and therefore you undertake to destroy the Union, it will be our duty to deal with you as John Brown has been dealt with.

We shall try to do our duty.

We hope and believe that in no section will a majority so act as to render such extreme measures necessary.

Ladies and gentlemen, I appeal to you all—opponents as well as friends—to think soberly and maturely on all these questions, and never fail to cast your vote.

Leavenworth

You are, as yet, the people of a territory, but you probably will soon be the people of a state of the Union. Then you will be in possession of new privileges, and new duties will be upon you.

You will have to bear a part in all that pertains to the administration of the National government. That government, from the beginning, has had, has now, and must continue to have a policy in relation to domestic slavery.

It cannot, if it would, be without a policy on that subject. And that policy must, of necessity, take one of two directions. It must deal with the institution as being wrong, or not being wrong.

The early action of the general government upon the question—in relation to the foreign slave trade, the basis of federal representation, the prohibition of slavery in the federal territories, and the Fugitives slave clause in the Con-
stitution, was based upon the idea of slavery being wrong. The government tolerated slavery so far, and only so far, as the necessity of its actual presence required.

The policy of the Kansas-Nebraska act, about which so much has been said, was based on the opposite idea—that is, the idea that slavery is not wrong.

You, the people of Kansas, furnish the example of the first application of this new policy. At the end of about five years, after having almost continual struggles, fire and bloodshed, over this very question, and after having framed several state constitutions, you have at last secured a Free-State constitution, under which you will probably be admitted into the Union.

At the end of all this difficulty, you have attained what we in the old Northwest territory attained without any difficulty at all. Compare, or rather contrast, the actual working of the new policy with that of the old, and say whether, after all, the old way—the way adopted by Washington and his compatriots—was not the better way.

This new policy has proved false to all its promises—namely, to end slavery agitation, and to afford greater control of their affairs to the people of the territories.

You have already had, I think, five governors, and yet, although their doings in their respective days, were of some little interest to you, it is doubtful whether you now even remember the names of half of them.

They are all gone (all but the last) leaving without a trace upon your soil, or having done a single act which can, in the least degree, help or hurt you—in all the indefinite future before you. This is the size of the governor question.

Now, how is it with the slavery question? If your first settlers had so far decided in favor of slavery, as to have got 5,000 slaves planted on your soil, you could, by no moral possibility, have adopted a Free-State constitution.

Their owners would be influential men whose property it would be impossible to destroy. If you freed the slaves, you would not know what to do with them. You would not wish to keep them as underlings, and could not elevate them to social and political equality.

You could not send them away. Neither the slave states nor the free states would let you send them there. All of the rest of your property would not pay for sending them to Liberia. You could more easily have disposed of not five, but five hundred governors.

Which is the greater—this or the governor question? Which could more safely be entrusted to the first few people to settle a territory?

The Fathers did not seek to interfere with slavery where it existed, but to prevent its extension. This is the policy of the Republican party of today.

We must not disturb slavery in the states where it exists, because the Constitution and the peace of the country both forbid us. But we must, by a national policy, prevent the spread of slavery into the new states, or free states, because the Constitution does not forbid us, and the general welfare does require the prevention.

We must prevent these things being done either by Congress or the courts. The people—the people—are the rightful masters of both Congress and the courts—not to overthrow the Constitution, but to overthrow the men who pervert it.
Senator Douglas has assured us of a great line, a line ordained of God—a line on one side of which slave labor alone could be employed, and on the other only free labor could be utilized.

It may be that the Missouri river was the line suggested by Douglas. If the line was ordained of God, it ought to be plain and palpable—though I have never been able to put my finger on it.

The attempt to identify the Republican party with the John Brown business is simply an electioneering dodge. I have yet to find the first Republican who endorsed Brown's proposed insurrection. If there was one, I would invite him to step out of the ranks and correct his politics.

It is imperative that the races be kept distinct. Because I do not wish to hold a Negro woman as a slave, it does not follow that I want her for a wife. Such flimsy diatribes, as the political arguments over "amalgamation," have been perpetrated by the Democracy to divert the public mind from the real issue—the extension or nonextension of slavery—its localization or nationalization.

The aims and principles of the Republican party harmonize with the teachings of those by whom the Government was founded, and their predominance is essential to the proper development of the country, to its progress and glory, to the salvation of the Union and the perpetuity of Free Institutions.