

LINCOLN AND AGRICULTURE

A radio talk by Dr. O. C. Stine, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, delivered through Station WRC and 32 other radio stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company, February 12, 1930 at 1:15 p.m. Eastern Standard Time.

Abraham Lincoln was born in a Kentucky log cabin one hundred and twenty-one years ago. The earth was the floor of this cabin and rough slabs held in place by poles and stones formed the roof. It stood on the edge of a tract of poor land which was covered by tall coarse grass and a few scattering trees.

Abraham was the grandson of a Virginia farmer from the Shenandoah Valley. His father was probably a better carpenter than a farmer and a better hunter than carpenter or farmer. His father had inherited a Kentucky farm of about two hundred acres but never went to live upon it. He bought another farm of three hundred acres at a price of 66 $\frac{2}{3}$ cents per acre with money that came to him by inheritance. It was upon this farm that Abraham was born. Four years later the family left this farm and moved about ten miles to a smaller farm of about thirty acres lying in a narrow valley on both sides of a stream. After three years had passed the father decided to move again. In Indiana he hastily constructed an open-faced camp of logs and brush for shelter and hunted wild game for food during the first winter. For the next winter he built a log cabin with a left but no floor. For some time no chickens, hogs or cows were to be seen about the Indiana Lincoln home. Eventually the father acquired eighty acres of the land upon which he had settled.

When Lincoln was fifteen years of age, his father had about ten acres of corn, five acres of wheat, two acres of potatoes, and one of meadow. He had a few sheep and cattle. Had Lincoln's father been really ambitious, he would have found a poor market for any surplus products produced at that time. A cow and a calf were worth only about six dollars, corn 10 cents, and wheat 25 cents per bushel. To obtain money with which to buy goods, the father and son worked for other farmers in the neighborhood.

When Lincoln was twenty years old his father sold his 80 acres in Indiana and started for Illinois with two yoke of oxen, a wagon and a horse. He settled on the Sangamon River, built another log cabin, and in the first winter broke and fenced 15 acres of land. Shortly afterwards Abraham left his father's farm, never to return.

You have all read of Lincoln's struggles for an education, and of his boat trips down the river which stirred his interest in the rest of the world. He left his father's farm, as you know, to clerk in a store in a small town. He educated himself and became a lawyer and politician. Riding the court circuit in Illinois, he learned to know the problems of the pioneer farmer. When he was appealing for votes to be elected to the Illinois legislature, the United States Congress, and, finally, the Presidency of the United States, it was but natural that he should listen to his farmer constituency and in

the light of his experience shape his policies in accordance with the needs of the rural life which he knew so well. Lincoln's attitude toward agriculture and his understanding of the problems of pioneer agriculture are expressed in part in his address to Wisconsin farmers at the State Fair held in Milwaukee, September 30, 1859. This address contains many statements which I believe will interest you and I shall quote several parts of it.

"Agricultural Fairs are becoming an institution of the country; they are useful in more ways than one; they bring us together, and thereby make us better acquainted, and better friends than we otherwise would be....

"But the chief use of Agricultural Fairs is to aid in improving the great calling of Agriculture.....

"...I presume I am not expected to employ the time assigned to me in the mere flattery of the farmers, as a class. My opinion of them is that, in proportion to numbers, they are neither better nor worse than other people. In the nature of things they are more numerous than any other class; and I believe there really are more attempts at flattering them than any other; the reason of which I cannot perceive, unless it be that they can cast more votes than any other. On reflection, I am not quite sure that there is not cause of suspicion against you, in selecting me, in some sort a politician, and in no sort a farmer, to address you."

He says that he will undertake to make some general suggestions. His first suggestion is an inquiry into the effect of greater thoroughness in farming. He advocates better cultivation on smaller farms not only because he thinks that will be more economical but also because he thinks that it will have a desirable influence upon the farmer himself, for "every man is proud of what he does well and no man is proud of what he does not well". And the ambition for broad acres leads to poor farming, "even with men of energy".

The prairie farmers of that day, as those of today, were interested in machinery. Lincoln discusses at some length the application of steam power to farm work. Farmers were experimenting with the steam plow. To be successful, he says, "it must do all the work as well and cheaper or more rapidly so as to get through more perfectly in season". He points out some of the difficulties of operating a steam plow but hopes that it will be finally successful. He discusses at some length the position of the free laborer and his education, and concludes that "no other human occupation opens so wide a field for the profitable and agreeable combination of labor with cultivated thought as agriculture".

In closing this address he says:

" ... Let us hope ... that by the best cultivation of the physical world, beneath and around us, and the intellectual and moral world within us, we shall secure an individual, social, and political prosperity and happiness, whose course shall be onward and upward, and which, while the earth endures, shall not pass away".

When Lincoln became President he remembered the interests of his western constituents. In his first message dated December 3, 1861 he advocates the establishment of an Agricultural Bureau or Department, in these words:

"Agriculture, confessedly the largest interests of the nation, has not a department nor a bureau, but a clerkship only, assigned to it in the Government. While it is fortunate that this great interest is so independent in its nature as to not have demanded and extorted more from the Government, I respectfully ask Congress to consider whether something more can not be given voluntarily with general advantage.

"Annual reports exhibiting the condition of our agriculture, commerce, and manufactures would present a fund of information of great practical value to the country. While I make no suggestions as to details, I venture the opinion that an agricultural and statistical bureau might profitably be organized."

Congress acted and the organic law establishing the United States Department of Agriculture became effective May 15, 1862. The first section of that act reads in part as follows:

"There shall be at the seat of Government a Department of Agriculture, the general design and duties of which shall be to acquire and to diffuse among the people of the United States useful information on subjects connected with agriculture, in the most general and comprehensive sense of that word."

The President of the Clark County Agricultural Society in 1858 had written to one of the Senators from Illinois: "There is no subject before Congress of one half the national importance as land grants to agricultural colleges". A bill had been introduced and passed by Congress to be vetoed by President Buchanan. It was reintroduced, passed, and signed by Lincoln July 2, 1862.

Thus the United States Department of Agriculture and the agricultural colleges established by land grants stand today as monuments to Lincoln's interest in agriculture and in the education of the farmer. Let me hasten to say that Lincoln alone is not responsible for these institutions but he had an important share in the responsibility for their establishment. Much more might be said about Lincoln and agriculture but time will not permit me to say more.