

In Lincoln's Shadow:
The Civil War in Springfield, Illinois

By

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the political, social, and economic development of Springfield, Illinois – Abraham Lincoln’s home – during the American Civil War. It argues that Lincoln’s martyrdom following the war and his assassination preserved the city’s position as Illinois’s state capital, despite the local populace’s mixed attitudes toward him during his presidency. He won the 1860 and 1864 presidential popular vote in Springfield by a combined seventy-nine ballots. He failed to carry his own Sangamon County in either election. When he and his family departed for the White House in February 1861, they left a deeply partisan community that only strengthened over four years of war. Before he became Springfield’s chosen son in death, he was a polarizing figure in the heart of Illinois. Simultaneously, Abraham Lincoln said farewell to a town struggling to keep pace with the population growth and economic development occurring elsewhere in the Prairie State due to the rise of industrialism. Lincoln’s death, including the controversial burial that followed, reversed both trends, bringing momentary unity to a community facing uncertainty during the country’s most trying period.

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INTRODUCTION:
“HERE I HAVE LIVED”

February 11, 1861 is a date etched in the history of Springfield, Illinois. On that cold and unpleasant winter morning, 150 of Abraham Lincoln’s friends and neighbors gathered at the Great Western Railway to watch the next President of the United States depart for the White House. It was an emotional day for all present. Lincoln, having already said goodbye to most familiar faces in the weeks and days leading up to his parting, did not prepare a speech for the moment, but soon changed his mind. After boarding the presidential train, Lincoln walked to the rear of the car, removed his hat, and, according to James C. Conkling, with a “breast heaved with emotion,” uttered the following words:

My friends—No one, not in my situation, can appreciate my feeling of sadness at this parting. To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe every thing. Here I have lived a quarter of a century, and have passed from a young to an old man. Here my children have been born, and one is buried. I now leave, not knowing when, or whether ever, I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of that Divine Being, who ever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail. Trusting in Him, who can go with me, and remain with you and be every where for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To His care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell.¹

Not considered one of Lincoln’s finest speeches, it was still a special tribute to the hometown he was leaving for, as it turned out, the last time. A lengthier version was reprinted the following day in the *Daily Illinois State Journal*, Springfield’s Republican newspaper. Local Republicans recited it in the final weeks of the 1864 election. The *Journal*, along with the Democratic *Daily Illinois State Register*, reprinted the extended version following news of the president’s assassination. It is inscribed, word for word, on the Illinois State Capitol building in Springfield. Renowned Lincoln scholars and biographers have quoted it regularly. This

¹ Douglas A. Wilson, *Lincoln's Sword: The Presidency and the Power of Words* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 11.

emotional parting connected the man with his hometown, and to this day visitors cannot avoid Springfield's association with Abraham Lincoln. Nothing serves that connection better than his "Farewell Speech."

But this relationship is rather significantly complicated, beginning with the "Farewell Speech" itself. Part of the problem, as historian Douglas L. Wilson has demonstrated, was the fact that Lincoln said something slightly different that drizzly February morning. One observer recalled Lincoln saying, "I now leave, not knowing when or whether ever I may return."² Others present that morning remembered something slightly different, even though the message was the same. We cannot know with any certainty what Lincoln said because the above-mentioned speech was written *after* the train left the depot. A reporter traveling with the presidential caravan asked the president-elect, after they had set off, to write down what he had said to the crowd, and Lincoln complied. Wilson suggests that Lincoln, both a skilled orator and writer, revised his comments on the train, aware that the enunciated word would not have the same effect in print. Wilson compared Lincoln's revised speech with other contemporary accounts of the event and found a distinction in the way the president-elect described his recollections of Springfield. The account on top seems closest to what Lincoln said, contrasted with the version on the bottom that Lincoln wrote on the train, with brackets surrounding the same words found in both:

"Here I have lived for more than a quarter of a century [and have passed from a young to an old man]; here my children were born, and here one of them lies buried."

"Here I have been a quarter of a century, [and have passed from a young to an old man]. Here my children have been born, and one is buried."³

² Preston Bailhache, "Abraham Lincoln As I Remember Him," John E. Boos Collection, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library (Hereafter cited as ALPLM).

³ Wilson, *Lincoln's Sword*, 15-16.

These two phrases get the same point across, but they express slightly different sentiments and emotions when read aloud. Only recently have scholars deciphered Lincoln's train-shaken handwriting and determined that he actually wrote the phrase "Here I have been," instead of "Here I have lived," thus giving the phrase an alliterative flair better detected through sound over sight. But even Lincoln initially failed to see the benefits of this stylistic difference; he uttered the word "lived" as virtually everyone in attendance that morning recalled. Only later on the train did he change it to "been."⁴ This might seem trivial, and the same scrutiny could be applied to other parts of that speech, but the main takeaway is thus: the passage written down that day by contemporary accounts – not Lincoln's written version – stuck with the community. They were reminded of it again over the next four years. Lincoln's 1861 "Farewell Speech" to his friends and neighbors held literal sway, even if it was not a literal chronicling of the account.

Apart from the veracity of Lincoln's "Farewell Speech," popular memory also obscures another facet of the sixteenth president's relationship with Springfield community. Contrary to his image in the city today, Lincoln was anything but a beloved figure when he ran and served as president. He won Springfield with a slight majority in the 1860 election and an even smaller margin of victory for reelection in 1864. He had less support outside the city limits, losing the popular vote both times in Sangamon County. This political divide had obvious consequences. For instance, Lincoln's Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation caught Republican allies and candidates by surprise in the 1862-midterm elections. When the Illinois State Legislature convened in 1863 with a Democratic majority and a Republican governor, Springfield was the scene for some of the most hostile and anxiety-producing political discourse of the period. In every election from 1860 to 1865, from the presidential race to the seat for local alderman,

⁴ Ibid, 16.

Springfield Republicans fought vigorously to maintain “Lincoln’s Home,” while Democrats campaigned just as hard to prove the opposite was true. This all changed with Lincoln’s death in April 1865. Almost immediately, Springfielders of every political stripe began merging their town’s history with Lincoln’s legacy, a rapid change that took shape with the war’s end and escalated with his slain body’s return.

This dissertation analyzes this evolution and argues that this transformation could only take place with the Confederate surrender at Appomattox just days before the assassination. This is what historians refer to as contingency. The Union Army’s victory served as a precondition to Lincoln’s recovered reputation in the city just before, but especially after, his death. His image continued its ascent as residents prepared for his burial. Moreover, the martyred Lincoln helped save the sluggish Springfield community. As unlikely as it seems, considering that roughly half of the local citizenry found Lincoln unfit for the White House, the slain president’s popularity helped his former hometown reverse the recent downward trends in economic development and population growth. Despite serving as the state capital and experiencing steady growth in the 1840s and early 1850s, on the eve of the sectional conflict newcomers to Illinois bypassed Springfield for better employment prospects in cities such as Chicago, Quincy, Peoria, and Bloomington. With the growth of industrialization in the state, these cities provided more job opportunities for those moving to and settling in the region. Furthermore, Aurora, Rockford, and Galesburg, Illinois, had fewer residents than Springfield but still witnessed their populations nearly double between 1860 and 1870; Springfield’s population, on the other hand, barely climbed during the war years, and at a much slower rate than rival communities.⁵ Springfield still

⁵ Ernest Seth McLain, "A Study of the Population of Illinois from 1860-1870" (University of Wisconsin, 1912), 11-12.

developed agricultural technology, but it was the only industrial adaptation the city made before the war. And compared with other parts of Illinois, it even trailed in that category.

This put Springfield's standing as the state capital at risk. Calls for building a new State House elsewhere occurred well before the shelling on Fort Sumter in 1861, and these cries strengthened when the current facilities of the Capitol began crumbling and proved too small to accommodate the rising number of legislators, staff members and clerks from the state's staggering population spike. But Illinois lawmakers suspended criticism of these confines once war commenced, implementing an unspoken agreement to revisit the issue after the guns had fallen silent. In this sense, the war provided Springfield a brief respite to address these issues. Realistically, however, the war stymied any chance of the city actually *making* these improvements. The conflict may not have brought physical destruction to Springfield as it did to large parts of the South, but it hindered the city's ability to grow. The Civil War put the town at a competitive disadvantage against other Illinois communities adapting to the rising tide of industrialism.

One explanation for this was the city's position as the state's military headquarters. The capital was in charge of clothing, feeding, arming, housing, and sometimes protecting against the damage that large numbers of Illinois volunteers streaming in and out of the area produced. This was no easy undertaking for a city with a population just under ten thousand residents and closer to the seat of war than all but the non-Border Northern state capitals east of the Missouri River and Washington, D.C.⁶ Limited state funding for specific military resources meant the city was

⁶ The Border States, states that allowed slavery but did not secede, include Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri. I do not include Charleston, West Virginia since it did not gain statehood until 1863. The other four Northern capital cities equally close or closer to the conflict, along with their 1860 population figures in parentheses, are: Trenton, New Jersey (17,228), Harrisburg, Pennsylvania (13,405), Columbus, Ohio (18,554), and Indianapolis, Indiana (18,611). Of those, Springfield was the youngest capital, it was further west from the wartime decision-making in Washington, and its population in 1860 was 9,117. Figures found in U.S. Bureau of the Census.

often liable for damages to local property caused by mischievous Army volunteers in the region. This left little municipal spending available for economic expansion outside of a water works system already put in place the previous decade. To an outsider during the war years, Springfield looked less developed than rival Illinois cities, a surprising characteristic for the state capital. This wartime commitment hurt Springfield, and some locals worried their city was doomed to replicate the previous state capital's fate, Vandalia, that also failed to keep pace with Illinois's population growth two decades earlier. Until they found a way to make their city attractive again, Springfield leaders had reason to worry the capital might be relocated once more, jeopardizing the community's future.⁷

Lincoln's death changed all of that. Northerners addressed him as the "Savior of the Union" after the Confederacy's demise. The assassination brought him martyrdom. Without both of those episodes, occurring five days apart from each other, Abraham Lincoln's legacy might be very different than it is today. His standing, not to mention the history of the United States, would be different had the Union lost the war or if events turned out otherwise. People might remember him as an average or below-average president, a figure few outside of Springfield would have celebrated, if they reflected on his presidency at all.

But the Union did win the war, and Lincoln's legacy has been shaped by that reality. And the people of Springfield, especially town leaders, sought to honor that legacy by associating the community with the martyred Lincoln. For the most part, Republicans and Democrats in the city put aside their political differences after the war to recognize their former neighbor's role in preserving the Union. Yet they also felt entitled, believing they deserved recognition for

⁷ Itinerant state capitals were not uncommon during this period. Illinois's first state capital was Kaskaskia and housed the legislature for only one term in 1818. Vandalia was the state's second capital, serving from 1820 until 1839 before Springfield was selected as the third state capital.

Lincoln's fame. Even he admitted as much in his 1861 "Farewell Speech" just before leaving for Washington: "To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe everything." The Springfield community helped shape and form this individual, and they intended to take Lincoln at his word. In their view, the best way to fulfill this promise was for Lincoln's final remains to be returned and buried in the only place he ever called home.

Not only did they consider Springfield the appropriate resting spot for the "Savior of the Union," local boosters also understood what his presence meant for the city's future. In an effort to both honor the man and attract visitors, Springfield leaders planned to build a monument that would carry on his legacy and bring renewed importance to their community. But this process proved more difficult, vicious, and unpredictable than anyone anticipated. And while this vision of abundant American tourist groups trekking to Springfield did not pay off immediately – not until many of the town's fiercest advocates for his body's return had themselves passed away – the fact that Springfield had possession of Lincoln's remains along with the promise of building a grand monument to him in Oak Ridge Cemetery gave the city the assistance it needed. Less than two years after the end of the war and Lincoln's death, and after years of threats by state lawmakers to move the capital elsewhere, the Illinois State Legislature approved Springfield's application to construct the next Capitol building. Calls for relocating the state's political epicenter – away from the city where the nation's martyred sixteenth president lived, matured, delivered some of his most memorable speeches, and where his remains are buried – withered almost instantly. Springfield did not become Vandalia.

This dissertation examines that paradox. It argues that despite the town's mixed attitudes toward Lincoln's presidency, his death, coming on the heels of Union victory, immeasurably enriched his reputation among former neighbors in the span of a few weeks. Perhaps more

importantly, this project argues that his martyrdom benefitted a Springfield community struggling to attract new residents at rates comparable to the 1840s and 1850s. The Civil War did not create this phenomenon – the 1860 census confirmed that the city’s population had slowed significantly – but the conflict perpetuated this stalled trend, and Springfielders failed to adapt to the demands of war and consider how the changes brought by it might be incorporated into postwar society. Nonetheless, the Civil War eventually proved to be a redeeming event for the community because it made Lincoln a martyr in the Union’s cause for reconciliation. Without Civil War, there is no Northern victory. Without Northern victory, there is no martyred Lincoln. Without a martyred Lincoln, there are few if any reverential monuments or plaques to him in Springfield. Without these tributes, Springfield’s fate as a viable city in the 1860s and beyond is uncertain. Lincoln, the “Savior of the Union,” salvaged Springfield from an unknown fate.

Lastly, why Springfield? Outside of Gettysburg, Springfield is one of the few communities in the North where the Civil War still resonates today, and this makes it worthy of study. More striking, unlike Gettysburg, Springfield attracts thousands of tourists each year even though no armies waged battle there. The obvious explanation for this interest is Lincoln, but the city honors Lincoln because he presided over the Civil War. Markers often depict him just before his journey to the White House; few capture Abraham Lincoln during the 1840s and 1850s, a time when he had a more immediate impact on Springfield’s civic life. Many of his images in town portray him with a beard, but he only began growing it three months before his farewell, and most people identify facial hair with his time in the White House. There were no memorials to Lincoln in Springfield before he left in 1861; therefore it was his martyred presidency that sparked Springfield’s association with the sixteenth president who served during America’s Civil War.

Outside of the city's connection to Lincoln, this dissertation explores the ways in which the war affected this community that served as Illinois's state capital. Like most Northerners, the Springfield populace failed to appreciate the magnitude of the approaching conflict. If the Republican rallies in 1860 following Lincoln's presidential nomination and election offer any indication, this segment of Springfield dismissed the likelihood of Southern secession. War was an even more remote possibility. Why was that the case? And did area Democrats react differently to this emerging national crisis? Also, when war did occur, how did the length of the conflict and the sacrifices endured from it shaped local opinion? How did the city respond to fallen soldiers from home? As the state's military headquarters – with its steady stream of soldiers and high-ranking officials moving in and out of the city – how did this endless presence of war-making affect daily life?

Part of the answer to those questions is that the construction of two military camps early in the war both intrigued and alarmed residents. Locals appreciated the eagerness and commitment from Illinois soldiers who converged in the area for muster at these installations, and townspeople often visited the men in camps and volunteered at the Soldier's Aid Society and the Soldier's Home in town. Yet many struggled with the distasteful habits and behaviors that these soldiers brought with them, most of them away from the watchful eyes of family and friends back home for the first time in their lives. Springfielders were equally curious and uneasy when the camp also operated as a prisoner of war site.⁸ Finally, its position as Illinois' military headquarters brought added people to the city beyond the above-mentioned military personnel. After the first year of war, residents noticed an influx of Southern refugees appearing in town

⁸ The U.S. District and U.S. Circuit courts for the Southern District of Illinois also operated out of Springfield, bringing individuals from Cairo (in Southern Illinois) charged with disloyalty to the state capital for trial. Kellee Green Blake, "Aiding and Abetting: Disloyalty Prosecutions in the Federal Civil Courts of Southern Illinois, 1861-1866," *Illinois Historical Journal* 87, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 96-97.

desperate for assistance. This project explores the reasons behind their arrival and how the community responded to their presence despite strong differences of opinion over the war.

This dissertation is also a response to the question social and political historians have asked of the Civil War: how did the conflict affect the North, if it did at all? This project looks narrowly at how the war altered or eluded other elements of Springfield society. Aside from serving as the state's military headquarters and the significance of Lincoln's remains buried in the city, there are two other major factors worth highlighting. First, the Civil War intensified political discourse in town. Even though war coverage sometimes fell from the headlines during long stretches between battles, it was never far from the minds of most residents who either had loved-ones serving or knew someone volunteering in the Army. The war was a sensitive subject in town, and it touched nearly every facet of society, especially local politics. One's views on the war were often a reflection of party loyalty, similar to one's views on religion, the race for superintendent, or the actions of area soldiers, as examples. Because politics was ubiquitous to Springfield life, it only makes sense that a study of Springfield analyzes this component.

In fact, politics plays a substantial, if disproportionate, role in this study. Because Springfield stood at the heart of Illinois's political system, the area had drawn thousands of participants from across the state for political rallies since inheriting the capital. The local populace and economy were invested in political developments taking shape in the nearby State House, sometimes unable to avoid them. Finally, a prominent member of the community was serving in the White House during the most trying period in the nation's memory. The community bonded through politics, even though many Springfielders despised this reality. In his study of Lincoln's political evolution in the decade before the presidency, historian Don Fehrenbacher noted that political interest was not unique to Springfield: "The pervasive and

unremitting popular interest in politics was the most striking feature of Illinois life in the 1850's." The 1860s would be no different. That said, because Republicans controlled the northern part of the state and Democrats the southern region, "[t]o live in Springfield was thus to be near the center of conflict, and a prime political advantage."⁹

The April 1861 shelling of Fort Sumter united a majority of Springfield's citizens, but not all. Republicans were now more determined to crush the Southern opposition than they had been during the secession crisis. Local Democrats, on the other hand, remained divided after Sumter. Some of Springfield's Democracy condemned the Confederate seizure and supported Northern efforts to bring the seceded states back into the Union, with force if necessary. Others balked at the prospect of supporting a Republican administration proposing military action against its Southern countrymen. This group initially accepted Southern secession, and in fact blamed Republicans for stoking the flames of disunion. The closest the town came toward rallying for a restoration of the Union occurred after Democratic U.S. Senator Stephen A. Douglas addressed an overflowing hall in the Illinois State Legislature on April 25, 1861. The recently defeated presidential candidate and ailing Douglas urged all men and women, regardless of their political attitudes, to recognize the distinction between patriots and traitors, between those upholding the Constitution and those threatening to destroy it. The longtime statesman still retained the respect of Springfield's Democrats, and Douglas's speech swayed many that evening "to lay aside, for the time being, your party creeds and party platforms; to dispense with your party organizations and partisan appeals; to forget that you were ever divided, until you have rescued the government

⁹ D.E. Fehrenbacher, *Prelude to Greatness: Lincoln in the 1850's* (Stanford University Press, 1962). See especially chapter one, "Illinois and Lincoln in the 1850's." Quotations found on pages 14 and 16.

and the country from their assailants.”¹⁰ Holdouts remained, including some of Douglas’s closest friends and allies in the party. Yet for a brief period Democrats and Republicans in Springfield had a similar vision: suppressing this new Confederacy.

But this unity was always vulnerable, especially after Douglas’s death on June 3, 1861. Later that fall, the war in nearby Missouri brought the first glimpse of a radical effort to tie emancipation to the conflict, virtually eroding any lingering cohesion left in town. This prospect divided local Republicans, putting them in an unenviable position of guessing which way party leadership might respond. This uncertainty persisted until President Lincoln issued the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation in September 1862, laying to rest any speculation over the administration’s motives. But the move produced unintended consequences. The president’s Proclamation caught some local Republicans by surprise, including a handful of Lincoln’s closest political friends, and not all of them backed it at first. Alternatively, Lincoln’s action rallied Springfield’s Democrats. This group had struggled for years to find common ground over the slavery issue and national expansion, a microcosm of the party’s experience throughout the Northern states. But the party overwhelmingly denounced emancipation, and the Proclamation brought renewed energy to Democrats. The politics of emancipation during the first two years of war extinguished what lingering town unity remained from the early months of the conflict, culminating with the bitter and politically fraught 1863 State Legislative session taking place in the Illinois capital. By that point, few had any idea what this meant for Illinois’s participation in the ongoing fight for the Union, especially if abolition was included.

The momentous Northern military victories in the 1863 summer did two things. They brought a brief reprieve to the severe political discord in town, due in large part to the fact that

¹⁰ “Speech of Senator Douglas before the Legislature of Illinois, April 25, 1861,” Stephen A. Douglas Collection, ALPLM.

many of the town's volunteers had played a pivotal role in the siege at Vicksburg. Most back home (but not all) saw this as a time to celebrate the victory and grieve for the fallen, not an opportunity to score political points. The outcomes also dispelled Democratic accusations in Springfield that emancipation thwarted the Union Army's ability to fight. Democrats, most notably the editor of the *Daily Illinois State Register*, continued to rail against abolitionism until the Confederacy finally surrendered, but the issue was not nearly as potent as during the war's first two years. During the 1864 presidential election, for instance, the Democratic platform attacked Republicans for their inability to win the war. Only by electing new leaders could Northerners expect to see a speedy end to military operations, Democratic leaders argued, though the party remained split on what that meant for the future of the seceded states.

Lincoln won reelection after timely Union military victories in the late 1864 summer. This triumph capped off a pattern revealed after nearly four years of war: the link between good and bad news from the battlefield had obvious political corollaries in local races. Positive wartime results benefitted Republican candidates; Northern setbacks produced Democratic gains.

A point of clarification remains, however. Democrats in Springfield were always suspicious of Republicans, yet they were also a divided party, oftentimes not dissimilar from their opponents. Local advocates still revered Douglas after his death, and most upheld the senator's final plea to support the Union against traitors. Others were always wary of what the war might bring if Republicans remained in charge. There was little love for the Confederacy in Democratic circles in Springfield, just as there was no affection for abolitionism or Republican overreach. Antiwar Democrats, also referred to as Copperheads, were a minority in Springfield. The only time pronounced Copperhead attitudes surfaced in town occurred when the Illinois

Legislature met in the State House. The peace faction of the Illinois Democratic Party brought its antiwar attitudes with them to the capital; they did not feed off the local populace.

Heeding Douglas's last entreaty, even after emancipation complicated matters, most Springfield Democrats remained committed to a restoration of the Union. They routinely expressed their desire for peace because they longed to see an end to the suffering endured from the conflict, but that was no different from local supporters of the administration. Backlash ensued when Republicans lumped this attitude with the Democracy's regular denunciations of the war's handling. This partly explains Republican charges of "Copperheadism" within the region: anyone who questioned the war's conduct was just as suspicious as a secessionist. (Not lost on Democrats was the fact that some Republicans, particularly radicals such as Governor Richard Yates, likewise questioned the Lincoln administration's strategy throughout the war.) The major disagreement between the city's two parties was what a restored Union should look like, a dispute never resolved during nearly four years of war and always a contentious political debate during election season.

The last major development this dissertation analyzes is the townspeople's evolving attitudes toward African Americans, brief as that evolution was. After the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect on January 1, 1863, local documents reveal a growing – though still relatively weak – acceptance for expanded black rights in Springfield. Just six months before Lincoln issued the Proclamation, however, an overwhelming number of eligible voters in the city supported restrictions against blacks, including one prohibiting African American migration into the state and another barring enfranchisement for those already living there. These attitudes were little changed from those stretching back to Springfield's settlement. Even after Lincoln signed

the Emancipation Proclamation into law, a majority in town, including those who accepted the measure as a necessary component in defeating the Confederacy, still viewed blacks as inferior.

By early 1865, however, Springfield was the scene for widespread celebration after both houses of the Illinois State Legislature repealed the state's infamous "Black Laws" and passed the federal Thirteenth Amendment. But this shift was neither smooth nor always moving in an upward trajectory. Some of the community's most vulgar and obscene racial attitudes appeared during the war, exaggerated after Northern military setbacks prompted some in the city to question the war's worth, especially if it required freedom for all blacks. These racist remarks lessened in 1863 after Illinois soldiers in the field began expressing their approval of the Emancipation Proclamation. While down South, these volunteers had witnessed the system of slavery and how it aided their opponents' ability to wage war. The abolition of slavery would make their mission easier, these Northern soldiers claimed, and they encouraged friends and family back in Illinois to support the president's policy as a way to end the war quicker. Some even became abolitionists and supporters for black rights after witnessing the plight of African Americans living in the South, demonstrated in their letters home.

Later that year, many across the North had come to a similar conclusion, including in Springfield. They gradually appreciated what Lincoln meant when, in a letter to friends and former neighbors back home, he claimed:

I thought that in your struggle for the Union, to whatever extent the negroes should cease helping the enemy, to that extent it weakened the enemy in his resistance to you. Do you think differently? I thought that whatever negroes can be got to do as soldiers, leaves just so much less for white soldiers to do, in saving the Union. Does it appear otherwise to you? But negroes, like other people, act upon motives. Why should they do any thing for us, if we will do nothing for them? If they stake their lives for us, they must be prompted by the strongest motive--even the promise of freedom. And the promise being made, must be kept.¹¹

¹¹ Abraham Lincoln to James C. Conkling, August 26, 1863, Lincoln Collection, Library of Congress (Hereafter cited as LOC).

This transition during the war years, capped off with Lincoln's reelection and Republican successes in 1864, paved the way for the 1865 celebrations on the steps of the Illinois State House.¹²

But this mood was fleeting. The explanation for this, along with the above argument for a turnaround in Springfield's economic and development misfortune, was Lincoln's death. So vast was the town's sorrow following Lincoln's assassination that every other concern, including the status of African Americans, was pushed aside out of respect for the community's former neighbor. As a result, local whites and blacks honored the fallen president differently. While Springfield's white residents celebrated Lincoln's role in crushing the rebellion and preserving the nation, the town's black population praised Lincoln for his actions that benefitted their race. They applauded the Emancipation Proclamation and the president's willingness to allow African American men to fight on behalf of the Union. Local whites failed to appreciate this attitude at the time, and because they were in charge of the funeral preparations they emphasized Lincoln's role as the "Savior of the Union." African American tributes in the sixteenth president's hometown were virtually repressed or ignored altogether, as they would be for decades afterward. This racial split escalated in the postwar years, climaxing with the deadly 1908 Springfield Race Riots, one year shy of the city's centennial celebrations marking Abraham Lincoln's birth. And though blacks across the country continued to visit and make their homes in the town that held Lincoln's remains in the decades after the Civil War, few of them received equal treatment in this place many had come to identify as the home of the "Great Emancipator."

¹² Nicole Etcheson found a similar pattern among residents in her study on Putnam County, Indiana during the Civil War era. See Nicole Etcheson, *A Generation at War: The Civil War Era in a Northern Community* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 17.

Historiography

Scholarship on the Northern home front during the American Civil War still lags behind treatment of battles, military leaders, and Abraham Lincoln's presidency, but that gap is narrowing. In 1988, Phillip Shaw Paludan's "*A People's Contest*": *The Union and Civil War, 1861-1865* was the first full-scale examination of Northern society since 1910, and historians began turning their attention to this largely-neglected region. Books on major cities such as New York, Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia have been published since Paludan's book appeared, as well as state and community studies spanning the North from Maine to California. To varied degrees, these studies analyze the social, political, economic, and military shifts and challenges brought on by the war. They also attempt to understand how the war altered the societies and lives of individuals back home, from those a safe distance away from the fighting to others whose lives were consumed by war on a regular basis. These works typically fall into one of two categories. Some align with Paludan's conclusion that the war brought substantial changes to a Northern society already undergoing industrial transformations. Other histories subscribe to the thesis offered by J. Matthew Gallman who argued in his 1994 work *The North Fights the Civil War: The Home Front* that the war actually brought few revolutionary changes to the region. He reached that conclusion researching Philadelphia's experience during the Civil War, and it certainly applies to other parts of the North as well.

This project uniquely straddles the two arguments put forth by Paludan and Gallman. Politics was foremost in Springfield, and the war did nothing to alter this feature – if anything, the conflict intensified partisanship in town. The war also did little to mend the city's downward economic trends and its inability to attract newcomers before the secession crisis unraveled. In this sense, Gallman's argument reigns supreme, but only until Lincoln's death. Lincoln's sudden

martyrdom and burial in the city, consequences of the war, reversed these negative developments. Here, Paludan's thesis shines through. While Civil War historians understandably note the distinctions between Paludan and Gallman, the Civil War in Springfield actually serves as a link between these two arguments.

In addition to multiple biographies on prominent individuals, three secondary works on Lincoln's hometown have proven useful.¹³ The first is Paul M. Angle's *"Here I Have Lived": A History of Lincoln's Springfield, 1821-1865*, originally published in 1935. Aside from devoting only one chapter to the Civil War, Angle's book relied primarily on newspaper accounts from the era. His study is helpful in understanding antebellum Springfield, but it is outdated, and the war years need updating. The other work is a master's thesis, *Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War*, published in 1991 by Camilla Quinn. Her work is an extension of Angle's book focusing solely on the war years, yet also relying primarily on newspaper accounts as primary references. The two organs in Springfield often represented the extreme wing of each political party, and each authors' weighty reliance on these newspaper accounts emphasizes the era's more partisan views in town. As a result, they often omit other attitudes that make the story of Springfield so much more complex. Lastly, neither work looks closely at Lincoln's association with Springfield during and after the war, but instead focuses almost solely on the city's response to war. There is no mention of Springfield's uncertain fate as the future of Illinois's state capital, and virtually no

¹³ Some of the biographies I have relied upon include: David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995); Ronald C. White, *A. Lincoln: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 2009); David Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948); Jean H. Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln: A Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987); Catherine Clinton, *Mrs. Lincoln, A Life* (New York: Harper, 2009); Mark A. Plummer, *Lincoln's Rail-Splitter: Governor Richard J. Oglesby* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001); Richard L. Kiper, *Major General John Alexander McClernand: Politician in Uniform* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1999); Robert W. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); Richard Carwardine, *Lincoln: A Life of Purpose and Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007); William Furry, ed. *The Preacher's Tale: The Civil War Journal of Rev. Francis Springer, Chaplain, U.S. Army of the Frontier* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2001).

analysis on the role Lincoln's death played in the city's revival and why he is regarded with esteem today. My dissertation attempts to explain those phenomena.

Historian Kenneth J. Winkle has written extensively on Lincoln and Springfield, focusing on Lincoln's life before his election to the presidency. His 2001 book *The Young Eagle: The Rise of Abraham Lincoln* charts the experiences and events that shaped the man who would become America's sixteenth president. His book ends with Lincoln's 1861 "Farewell Speech." Winkle has also written various articles on the same theme, some that were included in his book, such as Springfield's Second Party System of the 1830s and 1840s as well as a reevaluation of Lincoln as a "self-made man." More than any other reference, Winkle's book and articles helped me understand Springfield society before the war and have allowed me to track changes and continuities that occurred during the war years.

Other works that helped with understanding Antebellum Springfield include Don Fehrenbacher's *Prelude to Greatness: Lincoln in the 1850s* (1962), and Christopher Elliott Wallace's dissertation "The Opportunity to Grow: Springfield, Illinois During the 1850s," (1983), which studies the town's social mobility in the decade before the Civil War. For help with understanding Northern politics, I have relied extensively on Adam I. P. Smith's *No Party Now: Politics in the Civil War North* (2006) and Jennifer L. Weber's *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North* (2006). Nicole Etcheson's *A Generation at War: The Civil War Era in a Northern Community* (2011) served as a model for me, not only because of the proximity between Southern Indiana and Central Illinois, but also because her work helped shape my thinking on local attitudes toward politics, race, and, to some extent, gender in Springfield.

Part of my interest in this project stems from the question Maris A. Vinovskis asked nearly a quarter century ago: “Have Social Historians Lost the Civil War?” Vinovskis criticized those social historians who “paid little attention to the impact of the Civil War on the lives of nineteenth-century Americans.”¹⁴ Because my project only covers the war years, I have not fully responded to this call for action. References to eras before and after the war will hopefully demonstrate that the conflict sometimes had a significant and at other times an insignificant impact on Springfield, Illinois. In the end, I hope that this examination on Lincoln’s hometown offers another way to study how the Civil War affected the lives of residents in this Illinois community, from individuals both known and unknown.

Two disclaimers for the reader. First, there are limitations and advantages to a local study. Springfield was one of Illinois’s larger cities in 1860, providing the historian with sufficient evidence in which to make assertions. The vast majority of personal papers and records I examined were located in the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum (ALPLM), surrounding institutions in town, and the Library of Congress’s online Lincoln Collection (LOC), a luxury that scholars examining smaller – and even some bigger – communities do not possess. But Springfield was not a major U.S. city, slightly larger than a sizeable town in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast states. Sources were therefore disproportionate and sometimes sparse, meaning a few voices carried more weight than others, a challenge for the scholar hoping to fully grasp the community under examination. Early in the research stage I scrapped my initial plan to write a “social history” of Springfield because it was too daunting and, over time, not the story I believe needed to be told. Most of the letters and diaries I confronted were written by educated and financially-stable individuals, and in general written by political allies and enemies of

¹⁴ Maris A. Vinovskis, “Have Social Historians Lost the Civil War? Some Preliminary Demographic Speculations,” *Journal of American History*, 76, no. 1 (June 1989): 35.

Abraham Lincoln. Once I recognized Lincoln's prominence in this project, another factor I overlooked early on, I began moving the story to him and the people in Springfield he associated with. Lastly, some chapters follow a linear account better than others; others dip in and out of chronological sequence. What follows, I hope, is a fair representation of the Civil War's impact on Springfield, Abraham Lincoln's hometown.

Springfield: From Settlement to 1860 Presidential Election

Comparable to other emerging Midwestern communities in the mid-nineteenth century, Springfield was still a city in transition on the eve of Civil War. Established in 1821, it was a small settlement along the Sangamon River that served as the seat of Sangamon County. The earliest settlers to the region were Upper South Kentuckians and Tennesseans who appreciated the land back home yet desired to live in a state without slavery. The southern and central Illinois terrain provided good soil for corn and wheat, attracting these nonslaveholding white Southerners. They were also overwhelmingly young, single, and male, and the dearth of women or children stalled any attempts at developing the area beyond an agricultural haven. The famous poet William Cullen Bryant visited Springfield in 1832 and described it as a "town having an appearance of dirt and discomfort."¹⁵

This unflattering view notwithstanding, Springfield replaced Vandalia as Illinois's capital in 1839 owing to its centralized position in the state. The town grew in the 1840s after inheriting the seat of Illinois government and, subsequently, when the Illinois Central Railroad connected Springfield with the growing Chicago economy. Surrounding farmers in the county brought their goods to Springfield to be processed, and from there they were shipped to outside markets.

¹⁵ Christopher Elliott Wallace, "The Opportunity to Grow: Springfield, Illinois During the 1850s" (Purdue University, 1983), 33-36.

Additionally, the transfer of the state capital provided employment opportunities for construction on the new Capitol building and city housing, as well as a growing demand for clothing and furniture to accommodate the influx of new residents and legislators to town. Springfield expanded in tandem with Illinois's growth, which was the fourth largest state in the country when Civil War broke out.¹⁶

Springfield's population in 1840 was 2,579 inhabitants, making it the second-largest city in Illinois at that time. That figure jumped to 4,533 residents by 1850, and more than doubled to 9,320 by 1860.¹⁷ As Christopher Elliott Wallace acknowledged in the title of his thesis, Springfield in the 1850s provided an "opportunity to grow." In the decade before the Civil War, immigrants from the Midwest and Europe altered the city's predominantly Upper-South complexion. The town attracted German and Irish immigrants, and local leaders in Springfield and nearby Jacksonville accepted a group of Portuguese refugees. Many of these newcomers, especially those from the Upper Midwest, opposed slavery or at least its expansion into the territories. Yet few abolitionists relocated to Springfield, scarcely enough to overcome the city's Southern social and political features.¹⁸

Despite these shifts within the past two decades, Springfield was far from a Midwestern metropolis. In 1857, a newcomer from the East Coast described it as "more of a village than a city." "Like many western towns," he went on, "Springfield (called 'Western' in those days) had its principal business center around the 'Public Square' – the State House being in the middle."¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid, 38-39, 41-42. Fehrenbacher, *Prelude to Greatness*, 5.

¹⁷ Federal Census 1840; Federal Census 1860.

¹⁸ Wallace, "The Opportunity to Grow: Springfield, Illinois During the 1850s," 144-145; George Rawlings Poage, J. M. Sturtevant, and M. J. Gonsalves, "The Coming of the Portuguese," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 18, no. 1 (April 1925). Unfortunately, few records from these newcomers are accessible or available.

¹⁹ Preston Bailhache, "Abraham Lincoln As I Remember Him," John E. Boos Collection, ALPLM.

Besides this governmental presence, the economy was still agrarian and dependent on the business needs of surrounding farmers. It also witnessed rival Illinois cities and towns attract the steady waves of western migrations occurring in the 1850s. On the other hand, Springfield had recently developed certain characteristics of a city. It was split into four wards. The city's immigrant and black populations lived in the two northern wards (one and two), where the notorious saloons and prostitution houses also operated. The town's elite lived in the southernmost wards (three and four), including former Governor Joel Matteson's mansion, considered the best estate in Illinois.²⁰ To reiterate, it was a city in transition, attempting to harness its past with the future.

Springfield was a Democratic stronghold in the early 1830s, but safely Whig by the latter half of the decade; this despite the Democratic Party's sustained strength across Central Illinois. John T. Stuart, Abraham Lincoln's cousin-in-law and first law partner, explained decades later that Springfield "was Democratic till 1834 and in 1836 & 7 it became Whig ... and this Settled Old Sangamon for nearly 20 y[ear]s." The Whig Party's collapse, the Republican Party's slow traction in the region, the town's changing social dynamics, and an unstable economy throughout the 1850s combined to reenergize the local Democratic Party in the years before the secession crisis. Springfield had evolved from the "Whig Island" of the region into a contested political battlefield before the 1860 presidential election.²¹

Abraham Lincoln was instrumental in the capital's transfer from Vandalia. Once the legislature approved the transfer in 1837, he left a waning New Salem for the new opportunities

²⁰ Camilla A. Quinn, "Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War" (Western Illinois University, 1991), 11.

²¹ Kenneth J. Winkle, "The Second Party System in Lincoln's Springfield," *Civil War History* 44, no. 4 (December 1998): 273-274, 283-284.

Springfield provided.²² Lincoln was instantly one of the leading figures in the community. He was an early town booster upon his arrival and, according to one local admirer, “very popular among his neighbors and a great friend of the plain people, especially young men and boys struggling to make good in their several occupations for he had himself known the rugged path they were traveling.”²³ Lincoln served as a town trustee shortly after moving there and was nominated for a seat on the town board, and between those two positions he helped steer Springfield’s transition from a town into a city. He continued to serve in a variety of state and local government positions during his quarter century residency there.²⁴

Lincoln idolized his fellow Kentuckian Henry Clay and was a staunch Whig. He served one term in the U.S. Congress in the 1840s, and afterward returned to Springfield to focus on his legal career. His relative indifference to political concerns during this period occurred alongside the Whig Party’s national demise. Yet in 1854, the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act revitalized Lincoln’s interest in politics. The bill repealed the Missouri Compromise and permitted the expansion of slavery into territories that originally restricted the institution, astonishing Lincoln and many fellow Northerners. He continued to identify with the waning Whig Party, withholding support or commitment from the multiple political parties springing up in the Whig’s aftermath, including the Republican Party. By the end of the 1850s, he was ready to join the Republican cause and contribute to the party’s growth. He likewise launched his own political credentials after an unsuccessful bid for a U.S. Senate seat against Stephen A. Douglas –

²² Paul M. Angle, *Here I Have Lived": A History of Lincoln's Springfield, 1821-1865* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1935), 59.

²³ Preston Bailhache, “Abraham Lincoln As I Remember Him,” John E. Boos Collection, ALPLM.

²⁴ Kenneth J. Winkle, *The Young Eagle: The Rise of Abraham Lincoln* (Dallas: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2001), 179.

a contest that consequently brought Lincoln national attention after a series of debates with the North's most influential Democrat.

When Lincoln departed for the White House in 1861, he left a political legacy in Springfield that increasingly overlooked his non-political associations within the community. Decades after the Civil War, Springfield native and Republican stalwart John W. Bunn reflected on Lincoln's political ties to his hometown:

He was always a Party Man, and in the closest touch and confidence with the other leaders of the Party. No detail of organization escaped him. The primaries in his own Ward and City, the County Convention and the State Convention, were each and all matters of interest to him. While he did not personally engage in them, he inspired and advised the men who did the work and he enjoyed doing all this as any man enjoys what he does well and with success.²⁵

In other words, Lincoln commanded sway and respect. Or, from the perspective of a political opponent, he was “the *dictator* at Springfield.”²⁶

The 1860 presidential election uniquely affected Springfield, pitting Lincoln against Democratic candidate Stephen A. Douglas, himself a former resident still with strong ties to the capital city.²⁷ Lincoln held to the customs of the day and refrained from campaigning, making a few brief appearances at rallies in town before the election. Douglas on the other hand shared no such qualms, and took his message across the country, including Springfield. The city could therefore brag that it was the only spot to host the two Northern candidates during the election.

Enthusiasm was justifiably vast from the two sides in town as Election Day drew nearer, as were insults against political rivals. One side's mention of a standing-room only demonstration was an opponent's uninspired event. Three voices that will become familiar in the

²⁵ John W. Bunn to Henry S. Pritchett, January 12, 1905, John W. Bunn Collection, ALPLM.

²⁶ Winkle, *The Young Eagle*, 297.

²⁷ The 1860 presidential election was essentially two campaigns: Lincoln and Douglas vied for the Northern vote, while John Bell and John Breckinridge appealed to the Southern vote.

following pages attest to this pattern. For instance, when Stephen A. Douglas arrived in Springfield in mid-October, scores of admirers turned out to see the “Little Giant” in person, the level of support surprising even local Democratic leaders in Lincoln’s hometown. Anna Ridgely – teenage daughter of Nicholas Ridgely, one of Springfield’s leading bankers and financiers and a devoted Douglas Democrat – documented the moment in her diary. She and her friends went to church and cheered for Douglas that evening, yet due to “great commotion, a large torch light procession passed by the church and with the shouting and music it was difficult to carry on the meeting.”²⁸ She was nonetheless encouraged by the turnout. Republican advocates recalled Douglas’s presence differently. Mercy Conkling, wife of Springfield lawyer James C. Conkling and family friends with the Lincolns, described the senator’s visit as “a great day for *democracy* here, but the numbers present were so *far* below what was expected, that the friends of Lincoln are in perfect glee!”²⁹ John Edward Young thought likewise. A farmer from the Athens Township just outside the city limits who travelled into Springfield weekly to sell his goods, the Republican Young took an active interest in the capital city’s political scene. “The Douglas democracy had a rally at Springfield to honor Douglas who was present and made them a speech,” Young wrote in his diary. “It was a very tame affair.”³⁰ The same reactions followed Republican events, only reversed.

These individuals had spent most of their lifetimes, if not their entire lives, in the area. How did a relative newcomer to Springfield absorb the 1860 presidential election? Two recent transplants, Elbridge Atwood and Preston Bailhache, explained the distinctiveness of

²⁸ Octavia Roberts Corneau, ed., "A Girl in the Sixties: Excerpts from the Journal of Ridgely (Mrs. James L. Hudson)," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 22, no. 3 (1929): 417-418.

²⁹ Mercy Conkling to Clinton Conkling, October 22, 1860, Conkling Family Collection, ALPLM.

³⁰ John E. Young diary, October 18, 1860, John E. Young Collection, ALPLM.

Springfield's political scene to family and friends back home. They were also Lincoln supporters, but scant prior exposure to this political lifestyle makes their perspective on the campaign noteworthy, their biases notwithstanding. Atwood, a farmer who moved to Springfield in 1859 or 1860, was amazed by the city's political engagement: "The people of Springfield are considerably excited about the nomination of Old Abe for the presidency." In typical fashion, supporters in town "fired cannon, and rung all of the church bells, the rest of the day. At night they held a meeting in the State House, and, after some speaking, the crowd all went down to Old Abe's, with a band of music, and called for him to make a speech." By August, Atwood continued, each party held "a political meeting almost every night," and Republicans erected a barn-like building near the public square called a "Wigwam" able to hold between three thousand to six thousand people. "They have got it decorated with mauls that Old Abe used up in splitting rails," Atwood confirmed. He expected an even larger gathering for the upcoming Republican convention in town, the projected crowd too large to hold inside the "Wigwam." "... I suppose there will be considerably less than two hundred thousand present; at least all creation are coming and some of the rest of mankind. I pity Old Abe for he will have to stand and shake hands all day."³¹

Not unlike most visitors and longtime residents, Preston Bailhache was also impressed with the Republican "Wigwam" and its immense capacity to hold throngs of people who wished to "hear the speeches made by the friends of Mr. Lincoln during the campaign." Bailhache, a recent physician graduate, spent his childhood in Alton and returned to the Prairie State from Philadelphia after his schooling. He moved to Springfield in 1857 and opened a practice later that year. He would enlist as an assistant surgeon in the Army during the Civil War. More than

³¹ Elbridge Atwood to Alice Atwood, May 27, August 5, 1860, Atwood Family Collection, ALPLM.

anything else, Bailhache was amazed by the Wide-Awake presence in town and throughout the country. Wide-Awake organizations sprung up across the North and in parts of the upper South, comprised of white men under the age of forty who adopted a militaristic image and marched in parades on behalf of the Lincoln campaign.³² According to Bailhache, they:

created a furore among old and young that could not be resisted, and what started as a 'Marching Club' soon became the largest and most soul-inspiring organization the country had ever seen. Miles of 'Wide Awakes' with their lighted torches carried by thousands of uniformed men and boys clad in glazed capes and caps with spread eagle badges made a sight to stir the red blood in every patriotic heart.

Years later, Bailhache recalled how multiple factors contributed to the excitement generating Lincoln's campaign in Springfield: "The 'Wide Awakes' made things lively for the boys and the Glee Clubs sang patriotic songs, while the drums and fifes added not a little to the general excitement and fun, so that the 'Wigwam' came in for one of the most sought after and popular resorts day and night."³³

Others remarked on the Wide Awake presence in Springfield during the campaign, including the farmer John Edward Young who rode into the city for the Republican Mass Meeting in August. "There was the most magnificent torch light procession every witnessed in our state there being more than four thousand wideawakes in procession all dressed in uniform and carrying lamps and enlivened by numerous musical bands."³⁴ After news of Republican victories in Indiana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania reached town in October, the *Illinois State Journal* reported that the "Lincoln Wide Awakes" paraded down "the streets with banners, transparencies

³² Jon Grinspan, "'Young Men for War': The Wide Awakes and Lincoln's 1860 Presidential Campaign," *Journal of American History* 96, no. 2 (2009).

³³ Preston Bailhache, "Abraham Lincoln As I Remember Him," John E. Boos Collection, ALPLM.

³⁴ John E. Young Diary, August 8, 1860, John E. Young Collection, ALPLM.

and torches, and going through their various evolutions.” At sunset they fired a salute and together sang:

Our armies, led on by the gallant Lincoln,
Will never know dismay;
We’ll appeal to Heaven’s King for the claim which we bring,
And drive all our foes away.
Abe Lincoln, brave Lincoln, we’ll all vote for you;
We will battle with our might, and may God speed the right,
On the sixth of November, aye.³⁵

Enthusiasm from Republican quarters in Springfield even convinced the teenage Douglas supporter Anna Ridgely to prepare for the worst: “Lincoln will be elected, but I hope not, for I tremble for our nation.”³⁶

Despite the narrow Republican victory in town, Bailhache proudly wrote “Springfield was the Mecca of central Illinois on that night of all nights when lightning flashed over the wires the startling news that ABRAHAM LINCOLN was elected PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES. Can you realize it – a poor and lowly Boy – a great and powerful Man?”³⁷ While the rest of the “whole continent is aglow” with the results, the *Journal* editor summarized the day after the election, the “peculiar warmth that lives on ... here seems ... worthy of especial notice. It is not so much the return of purity and the triumph of freedom that the people here hail, as it is the recognition by the world of the great soul that they have honored and loved for many years.”³⁸ Testimonials that the community deserved “especial notice” would reappear in April 1865, but the mood then was one of mourning and sorrow, not joy.

³⁵ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, October 12, 1860.

³⁶ Corneau, "A Girl in the Sixties," 418.

³⁷ Preston Bailhache, “Abraham Lincoln As I Remember Him,” John E. Boos Collection, ALPLM.

³⁸ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, November 7, 1860.

After the election, residents attempted to regain some sense of normalcy despite the new president-elect attracting office seekers and media from across the country to Springfield. But it was more than reprieve from the political circus that locals yearned; they also hoped for a resumption of economic activity in their city. On Election Day, Mercy Conkling acknowledged that “Nothing but politics is attended to,” but she and everyone in town longed for “a revival of business....”³⁹ Anna Ridgely, still despondent over Douglas’s loss, was doubly glum over the city’s and the nation’s economic prospects. For Christmas that year, her family “did not spend so much money as usual for the times are hard now, and our noble union is dissolved, South Carolina having seceded.”⁴⁰

The best example of uncertainty for the future of the country and the community came from Charles Lanphier, editor and proprietor of the Democratic *Illinois State Register*. “All gloom here. Business drooping. Nobody knows what Lincoln is going to do.”⁴¹ As a Democratic newspaper editor, Lanphier dedicated his columns to constant criticism of Republican thoughts and actions, acting as an unofficial mouthpiece for his partisan readership. His counterpart over at the *Journal*, Edward L. Baker, did the same. But these men were also invested in their community; otherwise both presses would inevitably suffer from a declining population. Lanphier shared the same local concerns as the Republicans in town he berated in his paper, though they did not always agree on the means at resolving them. Springfield was a city with an unknown future when Civil War erupted. Its fate depended on the country’s response to its own uncertainty.

³⁹ Mercy Conkling to Clinton Conkling, November 6, 1860, Conkling Family Collection, ALPLM.

⁴⁰ Corneau, "A Girl in the Sixties," 420.

⁴¹ Charles Lanphier to John McClermand, December 19, 1860, McClermand Collection, ALPLM.

Chapter Breakdown

Chapter one, “The Voice of Springfield?,” follows the various reactions toward the national crisis in Springfield from the 1860 presidential election to Independence Day 1861. This chapter argues that Lincoln’s public silence during his final months in Springfield had lingering affects after leaving for the White House, one that saw his influence and presidency challenged and questioned by Democrats and Republicans back home. By refraining from speaking openly on the potential breakup of the Union before his inauguration, local Republicans struggled to rally around a platform against secession despite the president-elect’s presence in the city. This void encouraged others in the party an opportunity to express their views on the crisis, yet because Lincoln brought national attention to Springfield, Northerners and Southerners wondered if these statements might hint at Lincoln’s thinking. These opinions ranged from acceptance of a peaceful separation from the slaveholding states to declarations of war against secessionism, making it difficult for contemporaries across the country to distinguish which views resembled Lincoln’s, or who in Springfield might have better insight into the president-elect’s ideas. The situation was not much better for area Democrats who also failed to unite on a response to secession and the prospect of war. Only after Stephen A. Douglas’s appeal in the Illinois State House in April 1861 did most party members champion the call to arms. For a brief period, the only time during four years of Civil War, the Springfield community laid aside partisan differences in an effort to restore the Union. But this unity would prove short-lived, undone by the uncertainty over the war’s purpose and setting the stage for a political battlefield in Illinois’s capital city.

Chapter two breaks from the political narrative and explores the other ways the war affected the city. It traces the conflict’s evolution, beginning with the town’s early

unpreparedness for war to its more immediate impact following the escalation of fighting in the Western Theater in 1862 that brought death and grief to many homes. It explores the ways individuals in Springfield adapted to the ongoing challenges of war, including a look at how ordinary citizens took responsibility and initiative in the latter years by establishing lodgings for soldiers and Southern refugees. Its distance away from the battlefield meant Springfield never experienced “total war” the same way the South did, but serving as the state’s military headquarters brought its own challenges. For one thing, Illinois recruits and volunteers acquired a poor reputation for abusing public and private property during their short stints in the area. Alternatively, with few ties to industry outside of agriculture, Springfield could only watch as rival Illinois cities invested in war manufacturing that resulted in economic prosperity and population growth for these communities. The war jeopardized Springfield’s position as an important Illinois city, especially its status as the state capital.

Chapter three returns to the political story, picking up where chapter one ended. ““The Home of Lincoln Condemns the Proclamation”” analyzes debate over emancipation’s relationship with the war. As early as the 1861 fall, the issue split local Republicans in the conflict’s first two years while steadily emboldening Democrats. Alongside upsetting news from Northern armies so far, Democrats resumed partisan attacks against their opponents’ inability to manage wartime affairs. A majority of individuals in Springfield, including some of the president’s political friends and allies, disapproved of the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation in 1862. Ahead of that year’s midterm elections, Democrats exploited their rivals’ division by campaigning on a platform Republicans branded “negrophobia,” and it worked. John Todd Stuart, Lincoln’s former law partner and cousin-in-law, ran and won as a Democrat that objected to emancipation (but still a supporter of the war) in Springfield’s congressional district.

Chapter four, “Lincoln’s Home on the Precipice,” focuses on the 1863 spring, the most politically hostile and uncertain period of the war in Springfield. After regaining both houses of the state legislature, Democrats attempted to pull Illinois out of the war in the wake of the Emancipation Proclamation. Leaders argued that they were the true loyal party, governing under the motto “the Constitution as it is; the Union as it was.” Definition of the term “loyalty” was a constant topic of debate during and after the session, from the halls of the State House to the streets of Springfield to camps housing Illinois soldiers across the South. Encouraged by their political prospects, though, the chapter concludes on a high note for Democrats. The party’s statewide convention in June attracted one of the largest crowds in recent Springfield memory, only to be eclipsed by events on the battlefield.

By 1863, virtually all Springfield Republicans had come to appreciate the wartime benefits of emancipation. Nearly two years after demonstrating its harmful affects on the party, especially during previous elections, chapter five examines this process in three phases. The first shift began when Illinois soldiers in the South wrote home explaining how the Proclamation made their mission easier. The second came after the monumental Union military victories in the summer of 1863 temporarily silenced criticism toward emancipation. The last occurred with the reading of Lincoln’s letter at the Republican Mass Meeting held in Springfield in September 1863. After the president appealed to the Proclamation’s moral and military importance, local Republicans no longer denounced or publicly questioned emancipation. Instead, during the height of the 1864 presidential election, the two parties in town centered on the war’s progress – not the abolition of slavery – that still resulted in one of the bitterest and nastiest campaigns in Springfield history. Lincoln and his party won handily across the state, but the president barely

won reelection in his hometown, demonstrating the town's enduring ambivalence toward its former neighbor.

How quickly that changed. Chapter six, "This City of Dead," explores Springfield's effort to reclaim Lincoln's body – and his legacy – as its own. Despite losing a considerable share of men during the war, the community experienced Lincoln's death differently. Regardless of the town's mixed views toward Lincoln before his assassination, virtually everyone in Springfield was involved in the process of making him a martyr for the Union. This was a complicated and rapid process, however, and this chapter examines the obstacles Springfielders faced in their effort to connect their legacy with Lincoln's, including a dispute with Mary Lincoln over where to bury his body in town. In addition to their desire to mourn and honor their former neighbor and friend in person, and the fact that Springfielders felt entitled to his remains and legacy, there was another explanation for having Lincoln's remains returned home: local officials believed that possession of the deceased president's body would help alleviate the city's economic and population downturn. The various setbacks and quick turnaround thwarted Springfield leaders' abilities to build upon Lincoln's martyrdom in the postwar period, and the association of Abraham Lincoln and Springfield we recognize today emerged during the early 20th century, not in the Civil War's immediate aftermath. But the seeds of that process began the moment reports of his assassination reached his hometown. Lincoln, the "Savior of the Union," salvaged Springfield from an unknown fate.

CHAPTER ONE:
THE VOICE OF SPRINGFIELD?:
DEBATING SECESSION AND WAR IN LINCOLN'S HOME

Abraham Lincoln and his family officially left Springfield, Illinois, on the morning of February 11, 1861. They boarded a train routing through six Northern states planned to terminate in the nation's capital.¹ Since his presidential victory three months earlier, however, Lincoln established a low-profile that made him the most sought-after yet also one of the least public figures in town. Lincoln's public silence in the period between Election Day and his Springfield departure created frustration and anxiety throughout the country, in the North as well as in the South. Lincoln scholars and Civil War historians have analyzed the impact that Lincoln's silence had on American attitudes during the "Great Secession Winter," but few have considered how this retreat from public scrutiny affected the city he called home, a place he "lived a quarter of a century" and the area where he "passed from a young to an old man."² This chapter traces Lincoln's presidential preparations and eventual departure from Springfield, but it also examines the attitudes of locals toward him and the fate of the country as Southern states threatened – and followed through with – secession from the Union. It argues that months after his departure, with the looming prospect of war strengthening with each passing day, residents remained divided over the direction of the country due in large part to Lincoln's silent strategy. Furthermore, this provided opportunities for dissent in Illinois's political capital, and not only from the local Democratic opposition. Today, Abraham Lincoln's words and image resonate throughout the city of Springfield; the same could not be said in the three-month period from his presidential election victory to his departure, widening the gulf between the man and his hometown over the course of Civil War. His refusal to speak on the national crisis from his election to the shelling of

¹ Mary Lincoln and her three sons left later that morning but joined the presidential train in Indianapolis.

² Lincoln's "Here I Have Lived" speech found in Angle, *"Here I Have Lived"*, 260-261.

Fort Sumter allowed political enemies and allies in Springfield the occasion to fill that void. As a result, Lincoln left a community that was as politically polarized as it was on Election Day three months prior.

The Grand Republican Jubilee

In the 1860 presidential election, Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas nearly split the Springfield vote, 1,395 ballots to 1,326, respectively. Douglas actually won a slight majority in the county, 3,598 to 3,556.³ But when the results arrived confirming Lincoln's election, the celebrations in Springfield were arguably larger and longer than any other across the country, regardless of the narrow margin in the region. Once Abraham Lincoln's victory had been assured, a reporter for the *New York Herald* wrote, "Springfield went off like one immense cannon report, with shouting from houses, shouting from the stores, shouting from house-tops, and shouting everywhere. Parties ran through the streets singing, 'Ain't I glad I joined the Republicans,' till they were too hoarse to speak."⁴ Even Lincoln, who "did not feel quite easy" about his chances earlier that day, allowed himself an opportunity to relish in the excitement upon learning of his hometown victory.⁵

Democrats in town were equally dejected as their counterparts throughout the nation, but in Springfield they could not escape the fact that the victor lived amongst them. The nineteen-year-old Douglas supporter Anna Ridgely expressed her entire family's disappointment that Lincoln won election, "for we had hoped that such a man as he without the least knowledge of

³ Ibid, 253. The two other presidential candidates, Southerners John Breckenridge and John Bell, received a combined total of 45 votes in the city and 207 in the county.

⁴ *New York Herald*, November 11, 1860, found in Russell McClintock, *Lincoln and the Decision for War: The Northern Response to Secession* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 41-42.

⁵ Harold Holzer, *Lincoln President-Elect: Abraham Lincoln and the Great Secession Winter, 1860-1861* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008), 44.

state affairs, without any polish of manner would not be chosen to represent this great nation, but so it is--.”⁶ Springfield Democrats such as Ridgely had to endure their rivals’ celebrations that had become a staple in town since Lincoln received his party’s nomination for president six months earlier. One evening, Ridgely noted in her diary that Republican festivities in the city had become stale, with one firework spectacle made up mostly of “rockets and Roman candles that we have seen all summer long.”⁷ Even worse for local Democrats was the fact that Lincoln gained revenge over his fellow Illinoisan and U.S. Senate rival. Douglas, once a resident of the city shortly after it became the state capital, was still a popular man in Springfield. He had worked for the Springfield Land Office, was a state legislature, served as the state’s secretary of state and then judge of the Illinois Supreme Court before he and his wife moved to Chicago in 1847. Douglas spent several months each year in Springfield before becoming a U.S. senator, and supporters and critics alike referred to him as the “Generalissimo” of the Illinois Democratic Party.⁸

Much to the Democracy’s chagrin, Republican celebrations continued in the days and weeks after the election, including a Grand Republican Jubilee honoring local party candidates who won their respective races. Ada Bailhache, wife of *Journal* proprietor William Bailhache, wrote her mother “We are subsiding gradually after the great political struggle but still we are somewhat excited about it, and will no doubt continue to be until after the inauguration.”⁹ Not everyone agreed with this assessment, especially as national attention turned toward the Southern

⁶ Corneau, "A Girl in the Sixties," 418.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 97.

⁹ Mrs. William H. Bailhache to Mrs. Mason Brayman, November 20, 1860, found in Harry E. Pratt, ed. *Concerning Mr. Lincoln: In Which Abraham Lincoln is Pictured as he Appeared to Letter Writers of his Time* (Springfield, Illinois: The Abraham Lincoln Association, 1944), 31.

states in the aftermath of Lincoln's victory. Before the Jubilee, threats of secession (and rainstorms in the forecast) threatened to ruin the festivity. Many in Springfield likely concurred with Lincoln's secretary John G. Nicolay who said, "People look and act as if they were almost too tired to feel at all interested in getting up a grand hurrah over the victory."¹⁰ Despite efforts to recreate the appearance of a campaign event with parades, canons, Chinese lanterns, transformers, and military bands, turnout for the affair was low. The *New York Herald* reporter assigned to cover Lincoln from the election to his inauguration explained, "Having been treated *ad nauseam* to Wide Awake processions, meetings, speeches, fireworks, etc., during the campaign," the people of Springfield "are now sick of all such empty demonstrations." He estimated that roughly two thousand visitors from outside Springfield made the trek, a much smaller turnout than projected.¹¹

Those who braved the natural elements were additionally disappointed that Lincoln – clearly the main attraction – refused to make a speech despite previous rumors to the contrary. Lincoln already appreciated his prominent stature and he instituted a quiet approach or risk escalating national tensions, as did the country's other foremost political figures President James Buchanan and Senator Stephen A. Douglas. With few key voices responding to national circumstances, people looked toward Springfield, Illinois, for possible hints of the incoming president's thoughts. The timing of the Springfield Jubilee, however, occurred as Lincoln reconsidered how much he should express his views on the political crisis. For one thing, he was not yet president. During the campaign, Lincoln followed the advice of friends and "the lessons of the past" by refusing to "say or write a word for the public" as a way to avoid alienating voters

¹⁰ Holzer, *Lincoln President-Elect*, 79.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 93.

and misinterpretations by the press.¹² After the election, he recognized that new statements or comments rarely changed peoples' opinions. He referred anyone curious to review his record over the past decade, including his "House Divided" speech. Days before the Grand Republican Jubilee, Lincoln's friend and local Democrat Mason Brayman believed silence was the president-elect's best option, provided he was in no position to implement policy. "Mr. Lincoln does admirably well in refusing to be catechized, or give new pledges, or declare his policy, under the threats now made. Let Mr. Buchanan face that music."¹³ However, pressure for Lincoln to speak on the secession crisis after the election grew, and he constantly debated with himself over whether to add his voice to the public discourse.

Lincoln ultimately remained firm against making a speech at the Jubilee. Instead, he offered a few words to the parade of Wide-Awakes that stopped in front of his house on their way to the rally. He thanked them for their support, and pleaded that they "neither express, nor cherish, any harsh feeling" toward those who preferred one of the other candidates. He concluded his brief remarks with an appeal to "remember that all American citizens are brothers of a common country."¹⁴ He initially considered saying more to the crowd that day, but deferred to the advice of his closest consultants and fellow Republicans.

Instead, they recommended that someone else speak on his behalf, someone with stature and close to him. Rumors swirled in some of the major newspapers, perhaps with Lincoln's encouragement, that Lyman Trumbull might add a few words to his speech hinting at Lincoln's position. The *New York Herald* believed Trumbull, the recently re-elected senator from Illinois,

¹² Ibid, 16.

¹³ Mason Brayman to Adaline Brayman Bailhache, November 10, 1860, Brayman-Bailhache Family Collection, ALPLM.

¹⁴ Roy P. Basler, ed. *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 8 vols. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 4: 141-142.

prepared his remarks with “Mr. Lincoln’s direct supervision.”¹⁵ Trumbull’s words would serve as the president-elect’s “quasi-official” views, and Lincoln’s placement on stage next to Trumbull would hopefully verify that perception.¹⁶

Trumbull began by congratulating the crowd on its election of the state’s “most honored son.” The recent Republican wave reassured him that the nation would return to a period of harmony and purity. He comforted anyone who feared what a Lincoln presidency would look like. He would be the “Chief Magistrate,” belonging to no party, Trumbull said, ready to aid any state whose constitutional rights had been violated, even those where he failed to earn many votes. To those threatening disunion, Trumbull said “Secession is an impracticability -- or rather, an impossibility.” The founders established the Constitution to prevent dissolution of the government; no state could simply secede whenever it pleased.¹⁷

Toward the middle of his speech, Trumbull incorporated parts of the passage Lincoln handed him beforehand, with some modifications. He stuck to Lincoln’s script early on, pledging to Southerners that they had no reason to fear the loss of their “property,” no different from the practice of his predecessors since Washington’s administration. Veering from Lincoln’s text momentarily, Trumbull vowed the new Republican majority would not interfere “with the domestic institutions of any of the States.” When he picked up with Lincoln’s message again, Trumbull felt no restrictions from mixing the two texts. When Trumbull read Lincoln’s passage, “Disunionists *per se*, are now in hot haste to get out of the Union,” he offhandedly remarked, “unfortunately, there have been a few [disunionists] in the country for some years.” He also omitted Lincoln’s encouraging comments that Southern unionists had begun arming themselves

¹⁵ *New York Herald*, December 4, 1860.

¹⁶ Basler, *CW*, 4: 141-142.

¹⁷ *The New York Times*, November 20, 1860.

against potential attacks from their pro-secessionist neighbors. “I am rather glad of this military preparation in the South,” Lincoln wrote, but not transmitted to the crowd. “It will enable the people the more easily to suppress any uprisings there, which their misrepresentations of purposes may have encouraged.”¹⁸ Finished with Lincoln’s passage, Trumbull ended his speech with a warning to secessionists who threatened to silence Unionist sentiment in the South. Anyone guilty of suppressing patriotism in the South would have to deal with the “great mass of the people of all parties” throughout the country who rallied around one sentiment: “the Union-- it must and shall be preserved.”¹⁹

Unfortunately, reaction to Trumbull’s address did not meet Lincoln’s hopes. Few newspapers North or South even acknowledged the speech, and even fewer could distinguish how closely Trumbull’s remarks lined up with Lincoln’s thoughts. Most organs that covered it found plenty to criticize. Pro-Republican editors considered Trumbull’s comments weak and an abandonment of Republican Party principles. Opponents likened the speech to a “declaration of war” against the entire South. “These political fiends are not half sick enough yet,” Lincoln concluded. “‘Party malice’ and not ‘public good’ possesses them entirely.” “They seek a sign, and no sign shall be given them,” Lincoln acknowledged, Jesus’ response in the New Testament when tested by the Pharisees and Sadducees to show a symbol from heaven. Frustrated, Lincoln reinstated his quiet strategy on national affairs until his inauguration.²⁰

While the aftermath of the Trumbull episode caught Lincoln by surprise, the Springfield Jubilee highlighted another consequence of the president-elect’s silence. The void created by few prominent voices addressing the nation’s worsening calamity allowed others an opportunity to

¹⁸ Basler, *CW*, 4: 141-142.

¹⁹ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, November 21, 1860; McClintock, *Lincoln and the Decision for War*, 52.

²⁰ Lincoln to Henry J. Raymond, November 28, 1860, *Collected Works*, 4: 146.

offer their views, including those in Illinois's capital. This produced confusion over which individuals in Springfield had insight into Lincoln's opinions. "While Mr. L. preserves himself and holds to the dignity belonging to his position," friend Mason Brayman mentioned, "his friends can do much by conciliatory language to disarm the blusterers."²¹ Unfortunately for Lincoln, he sometimes had little control over everyone in his growing circle.

After Trumbull spoke at the Grand Republican Jubilee, Illinois Governor-elect Richard Yates took the stage. Yates was not a part of Lincoln's inner circle, the man from Jacksonville having originally supported Missourian Edward Bates's presidential candidacy. But that did not sour their relationship. When the state party split over its preferred candidate for governor, Lincoln's intervention gave Yates the nomination before going on to win the election. Yet while it was Yates's moderate views that Lincoln appreciated, the incoming governor's speech differed sharply from Trumbull's more conservative tone.

Trumbull never claimed to speak for Lincoln while on stage – even though the two men coordinated with each other before the event – but Yates felt no such constraints. The governor-elect said Lincoln would "not budge from the principles laid down in his speeches and the Republican platform. He will be mild but firm." He might consider the prospects for conciliation, Yates said, "but none for compromise." Lincoln recognized "the right of South Carolina to cherish her institution if she desires, and to hold her slaves as long as she pleases," but should peaceful efforts to preserve the Union fail, Yates predicted that Southern states would "find in [Lincoln] the true metal, the fire and flint, the pluck of old Hickory himself."²²

²¹ Mason Brayman to Adaline Brayman Bailhache, November 10, 1860, Brayman-Bailhache Family Collection, ALPLM.

²² "Speech of Hon. Richard Yates, Delivered in the Wigwam at the Springfield Jubilee, November 20, 1860," Yates Collection, ALPLM.

Speaking for himself, Yates then lashed out at Southern agitators and Northern Democrats who had distorted Republican positions. He denounced the five “slaveholding Judges” on the Supreme Court who issued the infamous Dred Scott decision that hardly reflected the attitudes of the populace. He reprimanded the “classes of men in the South” who had advocated disunion and a “re-opening of the African trade” for decades. Yates argued that slavery was “the source of all our troubles” that pitted the two sections against the other. He called secession a hoax. Threats to separate from the Union had always been a component of America’s past, and the “pugnacious little State of South Carolina has been talking about disunion ever since she came into it.” “Southern fire-eaters” failed to appreciate the difficulties in forming a new nation, and he predicted leaders in South Carolina “would very soon knock at our doors for re-admission into the Union.”²³

Luckily for Lincoln and moderate Republicans, Yates’s address received little attention outside of Springfield. Even those in attendance, such as farmer John Edward Young, left reflecting on the “wide awake torch light procession, & splendid Pyrotechnic display, firing of cannon bonfires and a general illumination of the city accompanied with any amount of enthusiasm and good feelings.”²⁴ Yates’s remarks did, however, set a precedent over the following months as citizens looked toward their leaders while the secession crisis intensified. With men such as Lincoln, Douglas, and Buchanan refusing to speak out, politicians with typically less exposure and relevance – men such as Richard Yates – took advantage of the opportunity by assuming an authoritative position. This pattern remained even after Lincoln left Springfield for the White House.

²³ “Speech of Hon. Richard Yates,” Yates Collection, ALPLM.

²⁴ John E. Young Diary, November 20, 1860, John E. Young Collection, ALPLM.

The Interim

As November shifted to December, Springfield's mood – along with the weather – turned noticeably worse. The city endured a long stretch of below-freezing temperatures, rain, snow, and sleet. One visitor described the city as “one grand mud hole.”²⁵ The dreary weather discouraged travelers into town and virtually ended celebratory gatherings since the Jubilee. The one exception occurred on December 5, when members of the state Electoral College arrived at the Capitol to cast their official votes for Lincoln and Vice President Hannibal Hamlin. A recent snowfall notwithstanding, the *New York Herald* still reported “[a] large number of spectators were present to witness the proceedings.” Afterward, James C. Conkling hosted a “grand dinner” for Lincoln and the delegates.²⁶ This was the last festive event of the year in Springfield, which was fine with the editor of the Democratic *Illinois State Register* who believed local Republican celebrations were “about played out.”²⁷

The town's gloom also accurately described Lincoln's appearance in December, especially in the days before South Carolina's delegates formally approved a resolution to secede from the United States. One month earlier, Lincoln still had his typical sense of humor, “telling funny stories and cracking jokes,” Ada Bailhache observed.²⁸ But the combination of national events, the responsibility of filling his cabinet, nonstop meetings with office-seekers, and the occasional letters containing death threats began taking a toll on the prominent neighbor. Someone noticed that “[t]he appearance of Mr. Lincoln has somewhat changed to the worse within the last week. He does not complain of any direct ailment, but that he looks more pale and

²⁵ Holzer, *Lincoln President-Elect*, 148.

²⁶ *New York Herald*, December 6, 1860.

²⁷ *Daily Illinois State Register*, December 15, 1860.

²⁸ Ada Bailhache to Mother, November 20, 1860, Brayman-Bailhache Family Collection, ALPLM.

careworn than heretofore is evident to the daily observer.”²⁹ When asked why he decided to remain in Springfield instead of moving up his departure date, Lincoln explained his preference to remain near friends. “I expect [Washington, D.C.] will drive me insane after I get there, and I want to keep tolerably sane, at least until after the inauguration.”³⁰ Some of his closest political associates encouraged him to consider holding the inauguration in Springfield based on the number of threats he had received since the election, but Lincoln flatly rebuffed such suggestions.

While Lincoln avoided speaking publicly in principle, that position in no way implies he kept his opinions to himself. He confided in close friends with whom he could ensure privacy. John G. Nicolay recorded a conversation he had with Lincoln expressing his view that “the right of a State to secede is not an open or debatable question.”³¹ Lincoln also dismissed secession as a real possibility. One visitor recalled the president-elect describing Southern withdrawal as “a sort of game of bluff” while another detected “threats of secession do not alarm him.”³² His friend Elihu Washburne tried to relay the seriousness of these threats after returning to the nation’s capital in early December. Washburne, one of Illinois’s representatives in the U.S. Congress, said “The secession feeling has assumed proportions of which I had but a faint conception when I saw you at Springfield, and I think our friends generally in the west are not fully apprised of the

²⁹ McClintock, *Lincoln and the Decision for War*, 87-88.

³⁰ Holzer, *Lincoln President-Elect*, 197.

³¹ Michael Burlingame, *An Oral History of Abraham Lincoln: John G. Nicolay’s Interviews and Essays* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, Illinois: Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 16-17.

³² William J. Cooper, “Where Was Henry Clay?,” in Gary W. Gallagher and Rachel A. Sheldon, eds., *A Political Nation: New Directions in Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Political History* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 129.

imminent peril which now environs us. I am certainly no alarmist, but it is folly to attempt to shut one's eyes as to what is transpiring all around us."³³

Washburne's warning aside, South Carolina's official withdrawal from the Union on December 20 caught Republicans in Springfield by surprise. That day's edition of the Republican *Illinois State Journal* published the headline: "Disunion, by armed force, is TREASON," the statement President Andrew declared during the 1832 nullification crisis.³⁴ Lincoln may have encouraged the newspaper to print the headline.³⁵ Five days later, the *Journal* published Jackson's 1833 message to Congress excoriating nullification:

The right of the people of a single state to absolve themselves at will, and without the consent of the other States, from their most solemn obligations, and hazard the liberties and happiness of the millions composing this union, cannot be acknowledged. Such authority is believed to be utterly repugnant both to the principles upon which the general government is constituted, and to the objects which it was expressly formed to attain.... While a forbearing spirit may, and I trust will, be exercised toward the errors of our brethren in a particular quarter, duty to the rest of the Union demands that open and organized resistance to the laws should not be executed with impunity.³⁶

If one voice captured Republican reaction in Springfield, it was that of Old Hickory. References to the seventh president lingered in Republican circles in town, carrying into the opening of the state legislature in early January.

Andrew Jackson could not, however, shield the worry local Republicans conveyed after South Carolina's action. Just one month after the party's momentous political triumphs, the wife of a prominent Democrat in town wrote that Republicans in Springfield were "a little more blue

³³ Elihu Washburne to Abraham Lincoln, December 9, 1860, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

³⁴ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, December 20, 1860; Angle, "Here I Have Lived", 258-259.

³⁵ Despite his public silence, Lincoln still wielded considerable influence over newspapers, especially the local *Daily Illinois State Journal*. Michael Burlingame has also argued that Lincoln occasionally penned editorials, and if he did not write this one, Burlingame believes it reflected the president-elect's views. See Michael Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life*, 2 vols. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University press, 2008), 704-705.

³⁶ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, December 25, 1860.

and are a little more sober and cast down!”³⁷ On New Year’s Day, James Conkling described his friend Lincoln’s appearance weary yet stable. “Mr. Lincoln takes the Secession troubles calmly—is patiently biding his time, though it is hard to wait 63 days powerless to do good while treason is raging, openly and with a determination to dissolve the Union.”³⁸

The State Legislature

Lincoln wrestled with waiting while Illinois lawmakers considered their options as the opening of a new legislative session neared. The influx of Illinoisans with ties (hopeful or otherwise) to the legislature pouring into Springfield after the New Year produced more noise to the political uncertainty and limited lodging accommodations. Hotels filled to capacity forced some into boarding houses and sleeping cars around town, another example of Springfield’s inability to respond to the demands of a capital city in a growing state. Local merchants anticipated the business opportunities from each new legislative session, but less so this year as they struggled to keep up with demand from an already over-populated city. The day before the legislature convened, Lincoln’s friend William H. L. Wallace noted, “[t]he city is full of members and strangers & the hotels are crowded.” While some visitors hoped to capture a few minutes of Lincoln’s time, others came “seeking the little offices connected with the legislature.”³⁹ Another individual put it less eloquent, saying the hotels were “filled with gentlemen who came with light baggage and heavy schemes.”⁴⁰

³⁷ Malinda Iles to Son, December 23, 1860, Elijah Iles Collection, ALPLM.

³⁸ James C. Conkling to Clinton Conkling, January 1, 1861, Conkling Family Papers, ALPLM.

³⁹ W.H.L. Wallace to Ann, Springfield, Illinois, January 6, 1861, Wallace-Dickey Family Collection, ALPLM.

⁴⁰ Holzer, *Lincoln President-Elect*, 82.

Furthermore, their presence brought little clarity to the sectional crisis as uncertainty hung over the city. “Political matters are continually changing,” Wallace explained to his wife in early January, but “no man can tell in this turmoil what the morrow may bring forth.”⁴¹ Democrat Elijah Iles, one of Springfield’s wealthiest residents, displayed little optimism over the current state of affairs. “I have about made up my mind that the Union is bound to be dissolved,” he wrote to his son living in Texas one day before the legislature convened. If the nation could somehow prevent dissolution, however, Iles hoped it would be accomplished “without blood, blood, blood.”⁴²

Not all Democrats shared Iles’s grim outlook. While Republicans unanimously condemned secession, Democrats in Springfield and across Illinois lacked any consensus on the subject. In fact, since the party’s setback in November, internal debates plagued local members from agreeing on much of anything besides pinning blame for the county’s plight on Republicans. The North’s leading Democrat, Stephen A. Douglas, criticized South Carolina’s secession on Christmas Day 1860, but he was convinced “Republican Leaders desire war & disunion under pretext of saving the Union.” Douglas explained to Springfield *Register* editor Charles Lanphier that Republicans “wish to get rid of the Southern Senators in order to have a majority in the Senate to confirm Lincoln’s appointments; and many of them think they can hold a permanent Republican ascendancy in the Northern States, but not in the whole Union.”⁴³ For his part, Lanphier informed John A. McClernand, Springfield’s U.S. Representative in Congress, “Evidently [the Republicans’] game is to put us in the attitude of acquiescing in peaceable

⁴¹ W.H.L. Wallace to Ann, Springfield, Illinois, January 11, 1861, Wallace-Dickey Family Collection, ALPLM.

⁴² Elijah Iles to Son, January 6, 1861, Elijah Iles Collection, ALPLM. (Emphasis added.)

⁴³ Stephen A. Douglas to “My Dear Sirs,” December 25, 1860, Lanphier Collection, ALPLM.

secession while they are the rampart, belligerent, fighting, soaring beacon party, but can't do anything until after 4th March."⁴⁴

Party leaders hoped South Carolina's secession might unite Democrats, but that also proved challenging. McClelland vehemently discouraged states in the Northwest from following South Carolina's example unless as "an unavoidable necessity." He blamed the Southern wing's dogged support of slavery for splitting the party and he encouraged fellow Democrats gathering in the state legislature back in Springfield to pass resolutions distancing Northern Democrats from their Southern counterparts. By doing so he hoped to thwart Republican efforts of associating all Democrats with the Southern fire-eaters fixed on dissolving the nation. In sum, McClelland condemned secession and declared "the Union must be preserved."⁴⁵ His mentor Douglas said as much in his letter to Lanphier five days after South Carolina seceded: "We can never acknowledge the right of a State to secede and cut us off from the Ocean and the world, without our consent."⁴⁶

Democratic leaders realized their vulnerable position as the two parties convened the legislature on January 7. The state's party chairman worried over his "terribly disorganized" caucus heading into the new session. Lawmakers from Illinois's southern region sympathized with secession sentiment, clashing with the more moderate views of fellow Democrats from the Northern part of the state. Attempts to find common ground between the two wings failed in a meeting before the assembly opened, so they agreed to absent themselves from the first day of the legislature. The Republican Clerk of the House thought Democrats "may break up the

⁴⁴ Charles Lanphier to John A. McClelland, December 19, 1860, McClelland Collection, ALPLM.

⁴⁵ Stephen A. Douglas to Charles Lanphier, December 25, 1860, Lanphier Collection, ALPLM; Charles C. Patton, ed. *Glory to God and the Sucker Democracy: A Manuscript Collection of the Letters of Charles H. Lanphier*, 5 vols., vol. 1 (Frye-Williamson Press, 1973), 124.

⁴⁶ Stephen A. Douglas to "My Dear Sirs," December 25, 1860, Lanphier Collection, ALPLM.

session” entirely. They arrived the next morning, January 8, as if nothing unusual had occurred. Not coincidentally, January 8 was also the anniversary of General Andrew Jackson’s victory in the battle of New Orleans. Springfield’s Democratic representative Norman M. Broadwell took advantage of the noteworthy date and offered a resolution to adjourn “in honor of the day and its hero.”⁴⁷

In reality, he was trying to gain an extra day to help his party find a collective voice. Nineteenth-century Americans regularly marked Jackson Day anniversaries, but this year was unique as both parties attempted to claim the mantle of Old Hickory in the midst of the session crisis. Broadwell scoffed at Republican claims that Jackson stood with them because he condemned secession. Jackson fought against extremism, Broadwell argued, as did all of the founding generation who “encountered and surmounted in their efforts to preserve and transmit to us unimpaired the Union of these States.” Contrary to the disunionist rhetoric coming from Republicans and Southern Democrats, Broadwell concluded that the moderate Jackson would still side with his party’s Northern wing as those best equipped to resolve the current emergency.⁴⁸

Not to be outdone, Chicago Republican John Y. Scammon pointed out that Jackson’s actions against the British in New Orleans paled when “compared with what he did in the Presidential chair.”⁴⁹ Scammon requested that the bill include a phrase stressing Jackson’s “firmness, devotion, patriotism and unflinching courage and determination in enforcing the constitution and laws against all resistance, from whatever quarter it might come,” an obvious

⁴⁷ *Journal of the House of Representatives of the 22nd Assembly of the State of Illinois*, (Springfield, 1861), 13; Wayne Harley to Ellen, January 7, 1861, Harley Family Collection, ALPLM.

⁴⁸ *Journal of the House of Representatives of the 22nd Assembly of the State of Illinois*, (Springfield, 1861), 13.

⁴⁹ McClintock, 128.

reference to Jackson's rejection that states could declare some federal laws "null and void." Scammon's insertion caught Democrats by surprise, and it put them in an awkward position. By rejecting the motion they risked disassociating themselves from the party's standard-bearer and allowing Republicans an opportunity to claim it instead. If they accepted it, however, they essentially deferred to Republicans and their firm policy against secession. Since Broadwell raised the resolution to steal his party an extra day – and not wanting "to vote against anything Gen. Jackson had done," as John G. Nicolay observed – Democrats eventually yielded to the measure. After a few more efforts of each side attempting to claim Jackson's legacy, the motion passed unanimously and the legislature adjourned until the following day.⁵⁰

As the two caucuses worked in private to formalize their respective party's platform, Springfielders turned their attention to the outgoing Illinois governor's address to the State House. The speech from John Wood garnered attention because he and Lincoln had been friends and political allies since their days in the Whig Party, and Wood was someone Lincoln could trust and "safely commit" his views to.⁵¹ Wood took over the governorship following the premature death of William H. Bissell in early 1860. When Wood declined to seek reelection, he offered Lincoln use of the governor's office after receiving the Republican nomination for president. Lincoln's hand, therefore, might be detected in Wood's address.

Wood deemed secession unconstitutional. Speaking as the state's executive, he declared "the constitution which clasps these states [is] no temporary bond, to be worn and loosed at will." Rather, it was "as an eternal covenant" created by the founders and those who sacrificed their lives in the establishment of the nation. Protection of the Constitution should be the

⁵⁰ *Journal of the House of Representatives of the 22nd Assembly of the State of Illinois*, (Springfield, 1861), 13-15; Michael Burlingame, ed. *With Lincoln in the White House: Letters, Memoranda, and Other Writings of John G. Nicolay, 1860-1865* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University, 2000), 24.

⁵¹ Norman B. Judd to Abraham Lincoln, May 2, 1860, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

patriot's priority. If any other state within the Union felt wronged or injured by Illinois, Wood promised to address those concerns. Likewise, any prejudice endured by the Southern states should "be dismissed and forgotten"; the federal compact had remedies in place to correct any injustices that may have occurred. Wood appealed for conciliation, but ended with Jackson's motto that had become familiar by now: "THE FEDERAL UNION--IT MUST BE PRESERVED."⁵²

Little evidence points to Lincoln's assistance in Wood's speech, but that appears moot. News coming out of the South trumped the outgoing governor's remarks. On the same day that Wood addressed the legislature, an artillery unit opened fire on the *Star of the West*, a U.S. vessel on its way to resupply Fort Sumter. Two days later, Mississippi became the second state to secede from the Union. Florida followed the next day, and Alabama the day after that. With four states having declared their independence from the country, one of which openly attacked a federal ship after attempting to bring goods to U.S. soldiers, the people of Springfield and throughout the nation could be forgiven if Wood's message to his state was less than memorable.⁵³

Reaction would obviously have been different had Lincoln delivered the speech. Nevertheless, he stuck to his silent policy, allowing extremist newspapers and lesser-known politicians control over the dialogue. One place nineteenth-century Americans received clarification on national issues was the newspaper, a consistent but often dubious source. Larger U.S. cities had multiple presses and residents had options from which to obtain information. Springfield had two daily organs, one Republican and the other Democrat, providing each side's

⁵² "Message of the Governor of Illinois to the Twenty-Second General Assembly, January 9, 1861," *Journal of the House of Representatives of the 22nd Assembly of the State of Illinois*, (Springfield, 1861), 10-11.

⁵³ James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 266.

readership their respective party's views. During the secession crisis, Elijah Iles thought "the course of *both our papers* have a tendency to widen the breach"⁵⁴ Edward L. Baker, owner of the *Republican Journal*, regularly connected Democrats with "the traitorous demagogues" in the Slaveholding South while Charles Lanphier's *Register* made references to "black republicans" intent on sacrificing "the white man's highest hopes, in an impracticable struggle about the negro."⁵⁵

Adding to the ruckus, Richard Yates used his governor inaugural address in the State House to speak against these recent Southern developments. Anyone who thought Yates's tone had softened since the Grand Republican Jubilee was mistaken. Instead, the incoming governor again used the opportunity to condemn secession, slavery, and the Southern states for the country's troubles. Yates acknowledged the constitutionality of slavery, but he asserted that free and slave states could no longer live together indefinitely, that the two sections would remain in an "irrepressible conflict" until one side's system eventually prevailed over the other. For him, that meant slavery must necessarily "decline and ultimately yield" to the freedom of the Northern states, if one followed the trajectory of history. "Die it must, sooner or later; die, that the philosophy of history may be demonstrated; die, that man's most cherished hopes may not wither; die, that God's eternal justice may be vindicated." Surrender of Republican principles in an effort to appease the slaveholding states would, he said, amount to "a degradation of manhood" and "inevitably consign [the country] to the scorn of Christendom and the infantry of history."⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Elijah Iles to Son, January 6, 1861, Elijah Iles Collection, ALPLM. (Emphasis added.)

⁵⁵ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, January 17, 1861; *Daily Illinois State Register*, January 5, 1861.

⁵⁶ Inaugural Address of Richard Yates, Governor of Illinois, *Reports Made to the General Assembly of Illinois at its Twenty-Second Session*, volume 1 (Springfield: Bailhache & Baker, Printers, 1861), 13-14.

The *New York Herald* considered the inaugural “so radical as to make it altogether improbable” that it reflected Lincoln’s sentiments.⁵⁷ The speech was excessively hostile toward pro-secessionists, unlike Wood’s address one week earlier and Lincoln’s inaugural roughly seven weeks later. Despite his firmness, Yates slurred and swayed throughout. It was obvious to many that night that Yates’s ongoing struggles with booze were on display. Few who heard the speech could identify which parts were sober-minded and which were the result of inebriation. After describing the inevitable “destiny” of a united country without slavery, Yates later claimed that the Union would be stronger regardless – with or without Southern secession. Intoxication aside, the sharp contrast between Wood’s and Yates’s speeches demonstrated the multiple attitudes toward secession within the Republican camp and the party’s inability to close that gap. Yates’s address concluded, the party opened the legislature as the majority yet without a common platform.

Fortunately for them, their Democratic colleagues across the aisle were still similarly divided. When Democrats met for their party’s convention following Yates’s inauguration, members still expressed a range of views over the appropriate response to secession. U.S. Representative McClernand failed to see “what it is to be gained by the Convention” due to so many varied opinions.⁵⁸ But the meeting went forward, and a steering committee produced a set of resolutions emphasizing conciliation and concessions with the slaveholding Southern states as

⁵⁷ Plummer, *Lincoln's Rail-Splitter*, 59. Not only that, but signs also indicate that Yates was not a part of Lincoln’s inner circle. William Butler and Jesse K. Dubois, both longtime Springfield friends of the president-elect and fellow Republicans who served stints in the State House, worried about the company the new governor kept. They were especially concerned about being “slaughtered by Yates” and his friend Chicago *Daily Evening Journal* owner Charles Wilson, who apparently “has Complete Controle of” the new governor. If anyone influenced Yates’s address, it was Lyman Trumbull. Trumbull pressed Yates to take “a strong Union ground” and regularly associate secession with “revolution and rebellion.” See William Butler to Norman B. Judd, Jesse K. Dubois to Lyman Trumbull, February 25, 1861, Norman B. Judd Collection, ALPLM; Mark M. Krug, *Lyman Trumbull: Conservative Radical* (New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, Inc., 1965), 177.

⁵⁸ John A. McClernand to Charles Lanphier, January 4, 1861, in Patton, *Glory to God and the Sucker Democracy*.

the best options available in preserving the Union. The convention accepted efforts proposed by Kentucky Senator John J. Crittenden for the restoration “between the people of different sections of the country.” They rejected a state’s ability to secede, but they also condemned military action against a former member state with the intent of coercing it back into the Union. Such an action would “inevitably plunge the country in civil war,” making reunification that less likely.⁵⁹ These resolutions aligned with Senator Douglas’s position who, three weeks earlier, said, “I will not consider the question of force and war until all efforts at peaceful adjustment have been made and have failed.”⁶⁰

After adoption of the resolutions, however, few spokesmen stuck to them. The convention’s scheduled speakers expressed reactions ranging from pro-war to avoiding military conflict altogether. Henry S. Fitch, the federal district attorney for northern Illinois, spoke on President Buchanan’s behalf at the meeting. He told the crowd, “[t]his Union was purchased by blood; it was cemented by blood; and isn’t it worth saving by blood now?” To Fitch’s surprise, shouts of “No, No!” came from the convention, and they hissed him after he replied, “I say it is.”⁶¹ Alternatively, R. T. Merrick of Chicago argued that any use of force against one seceded state amounted to war on the entire slaveholding South. Merrick asked the crowd if they were prepared to march south and wage battle against fifteen states with slavery. Unsurprisingly the audience denounced this notion in unison. Instead, if war was inevitable, Merrick wanted to see Northerners defend their territory rather than fight in a foreign land. “If such a conflict ever comes, it will be war *in the North, and not in the South*. It will be war in Chicago--war in

⁵⁹ *The New York Times*, January 17, 1861.

⁶⁰ Stephen A. Douglas to Charles Lanphier, December 25, 1860, Charles Lanphier Collection, ALPLM.

⁶¹ Fitch would go on to serve as a Union officer in the war. He died during the conflict.

Springfield--war on the broad prairies of Illinois.”⁶² The favorable response to Merrick’s comments over Fitch’s speech convinced William Herndon that “The Democracy here are in open sympathy with disunion-treason.”⁶³

For all of their differences over an appropriate response to secession, Illinois Democrats gathered in Springfield at least agreed that Republican rhetoric and ideology had perpetuated the crisis. All in attendance applauded U.S. Representative William Richardson’s attacks against Lincoln’s 1858 “House Divided” given in that very same building. He railed against speeches by Lincoln and eventual U.S. Secretary of State, William H. Seward, for their statements that endorsed racial equality. They were wrong to claim “Away with this doctrine of the inequality of races,” Richardson roared. “It is in violation of the Declaration of Independence. The government cannot endure half slave and half free.” Lincoln, his house “Not much more than a stone’s throw from the hall of then convention,” received the brunt of the criticism coming from Democrats in the Capitol building.⁶⁴

Still he could only respond in private. In December, President Buchanan sent a delegate to Springfield whose mission was to get Lincoln’s public approval for a national convention tasked with finding a solution to the national turmoil. Lincoln, however, refused to offer his support and replied that “slavery propagandism” was the biggest threat to the nation.⁶⁵ He remained committed to upholding the Constitution in its current form, not amending it simply to appease disunionists. In a letter marked “Confidential,” the president-elect lashed out against the idea of conceding anything before he took office:

⁶² Paul M. Angle, ed. *Abraham Lincoln: By Some Men Who Knew Him* (Bloomington, Illinois: Pantagraph Printing, 1910), 123-132.

⁶³ William H. Herndon to Lyman Trumbull, January 27, 1861, in Pratt, *Concerning Mr. Lincoln*, 45.

⁶⁴ Angle, *Abraham Lincoln: By Some Men Who Knew Him*, 127-134.

⁶⁵ Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life*, 713.

We have just carried an election on principles fairly stated to the people. Now we are told in advance, the government shall be broken up, unless we surrender to those we have beaten, before we take the offices. In this they are either attempting to play upon us, or they are in dead earnest. Either way, if we surrender, it is the end of us, and of the government... They now have the Constitution, under which we have lived over seventy years, and acts of Congress of their own framing, with no prospect of their being changed; and they can never have a more shallow pretext for breaking up the government, or extorting a compromise, than now. There is, in my judgment, but one compromise which would really settle the slavery question, and that would be a prohibition against acquiring any more territory.⁶⁶

Unknown to all but a select group, he helped draft a preamble and resolutions that Republican members of the state legislature pushed and adopted in both houses of Congress. With the party's new majority in the two chambers, State Representative Franklin Blades explained Lincoln's attempt to shape the Prairie State's attitudes toward the federal government:

Resolved, That until the people of these United States shall otherwise direct, the present Federal Union must be preserved as it is, and the present Constitution and laws must be administered as they are; and to this end, in conformity to that Constitution and the laws, the whole resources of the State of Illinois are hereby pledged to the Federal authorities.

"It was not concealed from the Republican members of the Legislature," Blades recalled, that Lincoln penned this resolution and witnessed its passage before leaving town.⁶⁷

Lincoln's cautious silent strategy irked many in town as his departure date neared. Two days before the scheduled parting, Springfield physician Gershon Jayne expressed frustration over a lack of serious discussion on "the fate of the once called United States," especially from the president-elect.⁶⁸ The Democratic editor of the *Register* joined the fray, writing "The friends of the Union ... have looked anxiously to Springfield for one word.... They have looked in vain! Mr. Lincoln has not spoken one word public on the contrary."⁶⁹ Lincoln's refusal to speak aloud

⁶⁶ Abraham Lincoln to James T. Hale, January 11, 1861, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

⁶⁷ Angle, *Abraham Lincoln: By Some Men Who Knew Him*, 134.

⁶⁸ Letter from Gershon Jayne to Lyman Trumbull, February 9, 1861, Trumbull Collection, ALPLM.

⁶⁹ *Daily Illinois State Register*, January 23, 1861.

was the crux of a *Vanity Fair* joke. In the facetious column, the man many wanted to hear from finally addressed his Springfield neighbors. “Gentlemen, I *am* speaking,” he announced in this fictitious account:

Now what do you want me to say? I suppose you want to know about my Cabinet, my policy, my appointments, my administration, &c., in advance. I will tell you. I mean to have Cabinet pictures in my house, the best I can get, and Cabinet champagne, the best that I can buy, and any other necessary Cabinet that may be required. As to my policy—or policies—for I shall have several—I will have my two Life policies in two good companies for \$5000, each in favor of MRS. ABE. Insurance policies upon my personal property in several staunch associations. Lottery policies I am opposed to. The best policy, Honesty, I am in favor of.⁷⁰

In reality, Lincoln was rarely in a joking mood during the interim. “He has a world of responsibility & seems to feel it & to be oppressed by it,” W.H.L. Wallace observed in January. “He looks care worn & more haggard & stooped than I ever saw him.”⁷¹ A former Springfield pastor believed Lincoln’s friends “could not have acted more cruelly towards him than to have him made President. It will Kill him and set his wife beside herself, I verily believe.”⁷² At a National Day of Fast held in January at the First Presbyterian Church, several attendees offered prayers to the man “whom God had raised up to guide the ‘Ship of State’ over a rough and stormy sea.” Springfield Baptist minister Noyes Miner noticed the meeting’s impact on a teary Lincoln who admitted his graciousness “for the prayers offered up for our distracted country and on my behalf and I hope they may be answered.”⁷³

Despite the emotional outpouring at Lincoln’s farewell on February 9, he and his family left a deeply polarized community. “The state of feeling which might be fanned into a flame is so deep here in this city,” State Congressman William Homes said, “it might break out into an act

⁷⁰ Holzer, *Lincoln President-Elect*, 242.

⁷¹ W.H.L. Wallace to Ann, Springfield, Illinois, January 11, 1861, Wallace-Dickey Family Collection, ALPLM.

⁷² H Quigley to John A. McClernand, December 8, 1860, McClernand Collection, ALPLM.

⁷³ “Personal Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln,” Noyes W. Miner Collection, ALPLM.

of secession at home.”⁷⁴ Wayne Harley wrote his wife back home that “Everything is excited here about National affairs and Men are getting angry over the question War.”⁷⁵ Ten days after Lincoln’s farewell, Springfield police transported a “noisy individual” to the city jail, but not before exclaiming, “I am a republican, voted for Old Abe, helped to send him to Washington, intend to follow him in a few days and by --- *I will* not be arrested by any d--d Douglas democrat officers.”⁷⁶

For all that divided them, however, there was a relatively surprising sense of confidence amongst Springfielders in Lincoln’s abilities to address the challenges awaiting him. They simply differed over how he intended to repair those challenges. Elijah Iles, the wealthy Springfield Democrat, assumed “we are to have a division of this Country.” He trusted Lincoln would reach the same conclusion and “recommend some plan, to be brought about by Congress, for a peaceable secession.” Having accomplished that, Iles predicted his fellow Springfielder would “stand next to Washington in the hearts of the people. The one achieved our independence with blood, and the other, wise measures, that will arrange for a peaceable secession without blood.”⁷⁷ Alternatively, William Herndon had faith that his friend Lincoln would uphold the Constitution. “The South will have a sweet time in Disunion, on paper,” Herndon explained to a nervous political ally, at least until Lincoln was “sworn in and gets firmly seated in his Chair.” “I know him well—long—I may say intimately,” he wrote reassuringly, “I say to the Republicans—Fear not—stand firm.”⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Angle, *Abraham Lincoln: By Some Men Who Knew Him*, 123-132.

⁷⁵ Wayne Harley to Ellen, January 17, 1861, Harley Family Collection, ALPLM.

⁷⁶ *Daily Illinois State Register*, February 20, 1861.

⁷⁷ Elijah Iles to Son, February 11, 25, 1861, Elijah Iles Collection, ALPLM.

⁷⁸ William H. Herndon to Edward L. Pierce, February 18, 1861, Herndon-Weik Collection, ALPLM.

Debating War and Its Meanings

The divisive atmosphere Lincoln left barely subsided over the following months. That April's city council elections exhibited nearly as much energy as November's presidential election. When Democratic candidates won a majority of seats, the *Register* proclaimed the results a "rebuke" to the Republican gains the previous fall. Lincoln's friend Goyn A. Sutton, who sat with the president-elect in the telegraph room the night Lincoln learned he had won the presidency, lost his seat to the Democratic candidate George Huntington. "Let the word go out that 'Lincoln's Home' is sound," read its April 10 edition.⁷⁹

After the Lincoln family left in early February, the people of Springfield had an opportunity to shift their attention back to local matters, but only briefly. From Lincoln's Republican nomination in August 1860 to the legislature's adjournment on February 22, national events consumed the community's interest. Afterward, the *Register* observed that national politics "seem to be regarded as a secondary consideration."⁸⁰ The main issues preoccupying Springfield's engaged citizenry the following two months involved a contentious bill over internal improvements to the water system, the troubling 1860 census records revealing Springfield's stagnant population, and the possible threat of the Lutheran Illinois State University relocating to another city.⁸¹

Three days after the results of the municipal elections, residents learned about the Federal Government's surrender of Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor. Fort Sumter's shelling by

⁷⁹ *Daily Illinois State Register*, April 10, 1861; Springfield City Council, Minutes of the Council Meeting, April 11, 1861, Illinois Regional Archives Depository, University of Illinois-Springfield, Springfield, Illinois.

⁸⁰ *Daily Illinois State Register*, March 16, 1861.

⁸¹ Springfield City Council, Minutes of the Council Meeting, June 5, 1861, Illinois Regional Archives Depository, University of Illinois-Springfield, Springfield, Illinois; *Daily Illinois State Register*, March 13, 1861.

Southern forces radically changed the town's mindset. Mercy Conkling informed her son Clinton that "[t]he news from Charleston created intense excitement here yesterday."⁸² Lincoln received a number of letters from former hometown neighbors eager to share their advice on how the government should respond. James Hill, someone who had "always stood by you for the last 20 years," now failed to recognize the individual occupying the White House. Hill cringed at the thought of the "lowring [of] our Glorious old Flag" from the fort, abhorred at the thought of it "trampled on by traitors and to be made the hiss and scoff of the World." If given the order, he told Lincoln he could round up "110,000 good and true men with Jim Hill amongst them."⁸³ Another "honored friend" back home, J. Bergen, wrote Lincoln to express his view that surrendering the fort was immoral and culminated "in the loftiest art of National Magnanimity on record -- a sublime peace-offering -- rather than civil war."⁸⁴

The political fallout from Sumter was mixed. Republicans still upset with the recent local election wanted to see the administration act aggressively against South Carolina. Hill believed Springfield Democrats would render the evacuation of Fort Sumter a political victory. Louis Rosette, a friend of Lincoln's secretary John G. Nicolay and a former Springfield Republican Wide-Awake participant during the 1860 campaign, explained to his companion how local Republicans "were whipt out at the City election by traitors in our camp." The day after news of Fort Sumter reached town Rosette heard reports that the war was now in earnest, and "[i]n case the President needs assistance we hope he will first call on Illinois -- for we have fought for him

⁸² Mercy Levering Conkling to Clinton Conkling, April 15, 1861, Conkling Family Collection, ALPLM.

⁸³ James L. Hill to Abraham Lincoln, March 14, 1861, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

⁸⁴ J. G. Bergen to Abraham Lincoln, March 30, 1861, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

once & now and will do it again.”⁸⁵ Herndon, however, recalled a slightly different though no less enthusiastic atmosphere in town:

I saw democrat & Republican shake hands on the Union... All party distinctions were wiped out. The people sprang up from mere politicians to patriots. You could see the jaws firmly set, while walking along and with fists double[d] up muttering wrath to those who ordered the bombardment of Fort Sumpter ... War - actual war - present war had come upon us.⁸⁶

One day after Lincoln issued a proclamation calling for 75,000 militia troops to suppress the rebellion, citizens of Springfield “without distinction of party” were invited to a public meeting inside the State House. “Let every Union man--every patriot, be present. Let the voice of the Illinois Capital go out for the Union and the Union’s Flag,” the *Democratic Register* urged.⁸⁷ Residents and visitors crowded the capitol building eager to hear from prominent state and local individuals. While a committee prepared a list of resolutions, John A. McClernand, Springfield’s Democratic Representative in the U.S. Congress, approached the podium and denounced the states that had erroneously chosen secession. Despite his political differences with Lincoln, McClernand encouraged fellow Democrats to join him and “sacrifice party on the altar of his country.” This was not the time for “partizanship - all men must stand by their government and their flag.” Since Douglas’s presidential defeat – a campaign that McClernand assisted and supported – the congressman had lashed out at Southerners for the party’s setbacks in November. Back in January, Democrats and Republicans in Springfield, including Lincoln’s friend and former Republican Mayor William Jayne, praised McClernand’s speech in Washington against

⁸⁵ Louis Rosette to John G. Nicolay, April 13, 1861, Lincoln Collection, LOC. Rosette served in Springfield’s Independent Battery Light Artillery during the war. He and his brother John practiced law near the Lincoln-Herndon building. They were staunch Republicans who years earlier tried to start a newspaper called *The Republican* that failed to generate much interest. See Basler, *CW*, vol. 2, 390.

⁸⁶ Donald, *Lincoln’s Herndon*, 149.

⁸⁷ *Daily Illinois State Register*, April 16, 1861.

disunion as “mightier than the sword.”⁸⁸ No friend of abolition or the antislavery cause, McClelland remained adamant where his loyalty stood in the struggle “between rebels and the constituted authorities of the Union.”⁸⁹

The crowd appreciated McClelland’s call to set aside party differences for the greater good, but they cheered wildly when Lyman Trumbull insisted that the federal government take the war to the Southern states and assert its authority in the region. He “scorned the idea of this great Government *defending* itself against Secessionists.” “Let us make *them* defend Montgomery and Charleston!” The typically rational Trumbull denounced conciliatory efforts, even from fellow Republicans who advocated a softer approach to the seceded states. The “Grand Union Meeting” adopted the committee’s resolutions, and afterward men had an opportunity to enlist in militia units as part of Lincoln’s call for troops. Trumbull happily informed Lincoln of the mood in town after the event, wiring “There is the greatest enthusiasm here & all is right in this part of the State.”⁹⁰ Few in Springfield talked much about local affairs after Sumter, prompting the editor of the *Register* to remind his readers not to be “unmindful of their local interests.”⁹¹

Despite the rush of patriotism, some of Springfield’s Democracy struggled to find any redeeming qualities in either the new Confederacy or their own government’s punitive response to secession. Mercy Conkling expressed delight in the “wonderful and perceptible change” in

⁸⁸ N. W. Miner to John McClelland, January 21, 1861; William Jayne to John McClelland, January 28, 1861; Thomas Rider to John McClelland, January 29, 1861, McClelland Collection, ALPLM.

⁸⁹ *Daily Illinois State Register*, April 17, 1861.

⁹⁰ Lyman Trumbull to Abraham Lincoln, April 21, 1861, Lincoln Collection, LOC; Krug, *Lyman Trumbull: Conservative Radical*, 182-183.

⁹¹ *Daily Illinois State Register*, April 17, 1861.

local Democrats' repugnance toward the Confederacy after Sumter.⁹² However, following an address by Governor Richard Yates around the same time, the Democratic *Register* insisted that "He who cries loudest for the 'stars and stripes' is not always the best patriot."⁹³ Democrats in town desired to see the Union preserved, but not all were as eager as their Republican neighbors to use military force to achieve those ends.

When Stephen A. Douglas visited Springfield the following week, he brought a majority of the city's wary Democrats into the fold. Lincoln, aware of his former opponent's influence in the region and in his hometown, urged Douglas to travel and speak in places across the lower Northern states in support of the federal government's fight against secession. Douglas accepted the request, and arrived in the Illinois capital on April 25 where he addressed a crowd lining the galleries of the Capitol building. He opened with an ominous warning: "For the first time since the adoption of the Federal Constitution, a wide-spread conspiracy exists to destroy the best government the sun of heaven ever shed its rays upon." This movement had aspirations of placing its "revolutionary flag" alongside the U.S. Capitol before leveling it to the ground "among the rubbish and the dust of things that are past." His portrayals depicted a sense of angst across the nation that mirrored the French Revolution. A "reign of terror" and "mob law" would prevail throughout the land unless this new uprising remained unchecked. And if this conspiracy achieved its goal of breaking down "social order," it would not take long before "the guillotine [came into] active operation."⁹⁴

⁹² Mercy Levering Conkling to Clinton Conkling, April 15, 1861, Conkling Family Collection, ALPLM.

⁹³ *Daily Illinois State Register*, April 24, 1861.

⁹⁴ "Speech of Senator Douglas before the Legislature of Illinois, April 25, 1861," Stephen A. Douglas Collection, ALPLM.

A majority of his address was a vendetta against Southern fire-eaters whom he blamed for costing him the presidency. He mocked Southerners fretting over the vulnerability of their supposed “institutions.” “What evidence has been presented that they are insecure,” he asked? When have slaveholders possessed more rights in the nation’s history than now? As far as he knew, no man could identify “any one act of aggression that has been committed or attempted since the last presidential election, that justifies this violent disruption of the Federal Union.” Economically, Douglas explained that secession of the Southern states would cut off Midwestern states’ access to the Gulf of Mexico by way of the Mississippi River, thus terminating the region’s involvement in the thriving trade and export markets along the Eastern and Southern coasts. If the people of Illinois and across the Midwest hoped to trade goods by way of this major waterway, Douglas claimed they would be forced to pay a levy to the Southern states whose boundaries connected to that part of the river. “Can we submit to taxation without representation?” Douglas asked with an unsubtle reference to the American Revolution.⁹⁵

Compromise efforts had failed, Douglas asserted, and now Illinoisans and Northerners had to face this “war of aggression” directly. Douglas had “[t]ried hard for compromise,” but his recent travels throughout the South made him realize that negotiations were no longer an option. Northerners had two choices: they could wait for this “enemy” to declare war upon their soil, or they could rush to the Union’s defense and “meet the aggressors at the threshold and turn back the tide of revolution and usurpation.” Regardless of what plots this revolutionary movement conspired to commit, however, Douglas considered invasion of the seceded states unconstitutional. Defense was legitimate only if one country invaded another. Had a

⁹⁵ “Speech of Senator Douglas before the Legislature of Illinois, April 25, 1861,” Stephen A. Douglas Collection, ALPLM.

“Disunionist” presidential candidate won the general election and the situation been reversed, Douglas admitted he would have used all of his energies and “crushed you out.”⁹⁶

Similar to McClelland’s speech in the same spot nine days earlier, Douglas ended with an appeal for patriotism that went beyond political parties. The “first duty” of all Americans was “obedience to the constitution and laws” of the nation. It was the duty of all “to lay aside party creeds” until threats to the United States and its Constitution had been removed. Douglas still acknowledged his “irreconcilable and undying opposition both to the Republicans and the Secessionists.” In fact, exactly four months earlier he had accused Republicans of exasperating the secession crisis, arguing that they were “anxious to dissolve the Union, if it can be done without making them responsible before the people.”⁹⁷ The more immediate threat to the country’s future post-Sumter, Douglas claimed, was the new Confederacy. As such, it was vital that anyone who supported the maintenance of the Federal government “forget that you were ever divided” politically against your fellow Northerner. To make this last point clear, he called out Republicans that lumped all Democrats with secessionists, and he implored that Democrats avoid the temptation to convert “from patriots to traitors.” “The greater the unanimity the less blood will be shed,” he concluded. This emphasis on setting aside politics exemplifies the nonpartisan tactic explored by historian Adam I. P. Smith in his study of Northern Civil War politics. Douglas was slow to appreciate this movement, and it took his physical presence in

⁹⁶ “Speech of Senator Douglas before the Legislature of Illinois, April 25, 1861,” Stephen A. Douglas Collection, ALPLM.

⁹⁷ Stephen A. Douglas to “My Dear Sirs,” December 25, 1860, Lanphier Collection, ALPLM.

Springfield to encourage his fellow party members to suspend partisanship in the aftermath of Sumter's surrender.⁹⁸

Republicans lauded Douglas's address and referred to it repeatedly over the course of the war. The next day's edition of the Republican *State Journal*, a regular critic of the "Little Giant" over the previous decade, celebrated the Senator's tone. "A triumphant call to arms in defense of country, Government and Constitutional Liberty," the editor wrote.⁹⁹ Baptist minister Noyes Miner considered it one of the best speeches he had ever heard, claiming years afterward "large numbers crowded into the Capitol" and that Douglas's argument was so strong that women "swung their muffs around thin heads [and] threw them over the gallery on to the floor of the house." Miner's daughter, Mary, seconded her father's affection for the senator's speech, asserting that he had "never heard a man plead harder for the Union than the Judge did."¹⁰⁰

Democratic reaction, on the other hand, was mixed. Douglas's insistence on maintaining the Union brought many party faithful into line, even if force was necessary. Some Democrats who wavered on enlisting after Lincoln's initial call for troops added their names to military roll calls after the senator's speech. The *Journal* detected a strengthened sense of unity among local party members after Douglas addressed the State House. "Old Democrats who parted with the Senator on the slavery question now cheered vehemently. O! the power of patriotism."¹⁰¹

Douglas, however, had a different assessment of his party's mood. Republicans in Springfield

⁹⁸ "Speech of Senator Douglas before the Legislature of Illinois, April 25, 1861," Stephen A. Douglas Collection, ALPLM; Adam I. P. Smith, *No Party Now: Politics in the Civil War North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 37.

⁹⁹ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, April 26, 1861.

¹⁰⁰ Rev. N. W. Miner, "Personal Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln," July 10, 1882, N. W. Miner, Collection, ALPLM; Mary Miner Hill Recollections, March 21, 1923, Mary Miner Hill Collection, ALPLM.

¹⁰¹ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, April 26, 1861.

were devoted to the cause, but the Senator found his own party's reception "much less satisfactory" than he had anticipated before arriving in Illinois.¹⁰²

The *Register* echoed Douglas's call for patriotism over party, but some Democrats in town considered that motto absurd.¹⁰³ Springfield's Virgil Hickox, chairman of the Illinois State Democratic Committee, hoped the ailing senator would clarify his recent support of Lincoln's policies. Hickox warned Douglas that Democrats had begun to "distrust him (Douglas) on account of the great love that the Republicans profess now to have for him." They worried that "the Judge in sustaining what is really thus the cause of his country & the flag of the Union, has gone over to the republicans."¹⁰⁴ One Springfielder's prediction that Douglas's "presence & influence [would] create perfect unanimity" and produce "an undivided state, rallying in support of the federal government" never fully took hold, but came close.¹⁰⁵

Just before his death, Douglas tried to clarify his sentiments. He was not an "apologist for the errors of the Administration," he wrote in a letter to "some of his friends" including Hickox. Rather, he hoped to make clear the distinction between:

arguments used in favor of an equitable compromise with the hope of averting the horrors of war and those urged in support of the Government and Flag of our Country when war is being waged against the United States with the avowed purpose of producing a permanent disruption of the Union and a total destruction of its government.

This was not a problem that the two-party system could resolve. This was a question of "Government or no Government," and if Democrats hoped to reclaim their prominent position in

¹⁰² Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 868-869.

¹⁰³ *Daily Illinois State Register*, April 26, 1861.

¹⁰⁴ Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 869.

¹⁰⁵ W.H.L. Wallace to Ann, Springfield, Illinois, April 25, 1861, Wallace-Dickey Family Collection, ALPLM.

national politics, “we should never forget that a man cannot be a true Democrat unless he is a loyal patriot.”¹⁰⁶

Three weeks later, residents learned that Douglas had died in his Chicago home. The city held an official day of mourning on June 7, the day of the burial. Springfielders wore black and businesses suspended operations “while the slow tolling of funeral bells and the booming of half-hour guns, from sunrise to sunset, alone woke the solemn stillness throughout the city.” Partisan differences were set aside momentarily, but Douglas’s death did not resolve the underlying political friction in town. Leading Democrats still had doubts over his recent comments supporting the Lincoln administration, and his untimely passing failed to unify Springfield’s Democrats with the nation’s future hanging in the balance.¹⁰⁷

Conclusion

Days after the funeral, organizers in town began preparations for a grand Independence Day celebration emphasizing Springfield’s unity over its political differences. Fourth of July celebrations were always festive affairs in Springfield, but this year’s event was especially noteworthy. The Democratic *Register* argued it was the most important Fourth in the nation’s history. “On no occasion since the battles of liberty were fought and won on our soil, did it behoove American citizens to be more unanimous in their celebration of this time-honored day.”¹⁰⁸ The Republican *Journal* concurred, adding that never “has there been an anniversary of the event so important as will be the coming Fourth, when the life of the nation that day born is

¹⁰⁶ Stephen A. Douglas to Virgil Hickox, May 10, 1861, Stephen A. Douglas Collection, ALPLM.

¹⁰⁷ Springfield City Council Minutes, June 5, 1861, Illinois Regional Archives Depository, University of Illinois-Springfield, Springfield, Illinois; *Daily Illinois State Register*, June 7, 8, 1861; Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 870.

¹⁰⁸ *Daily Illinois State Register*, June 12, 1861; Wallace, “The Opportunity to Grow: Springfield, Illinois During the 1850s,” 47.

now threatened by traitors.”¹⁰⁹ On the holiday morning, visitors from outside town arrived early to join in the festivities. Philemon Stout, a farmer and a Democrat from nearby Ball Township who traveled into Springfield weekly selling his goods, brought his family and “had a very good celebration.”¹¹⁰ The patriotic display even surprised Springfield’s Mercy Conkling. “[T]he day has been celebrated here, more generally than for many years,” she observed, and “we are rallying more closely than ever round the Stars & Stripes.” It would be the last time Springfield Republicans and Democrats held a joint Independence Day celebration until 1865, after the guns of war had fallen silent.¹¹¹

Three weeks after the event, reports that the Union Army suffered defeat at the Battle of Bull Run crushed everyone’s mood in town. Many now realized that the war would be neither swift nor painless. When emancipation entered the discussion later that summer, it only added to the city’s anxiety by creating more controversy over the war’s ultimate objectives and how it should progress. The ebb and flow of war produced uncertainty and anxiety for townspeople, constantly forcing them to reassess their commitment to the cause.

No single voice spoke for the people in Springfield in the eight months since Lincoln’s presidential election, and no single voice reflected the peoples’ sentiments during the Civil War. That was especially true of Lincoln. Despite his mythical status in the city today, Springfield’s “favorite son” had little connection to his hometown over the course of the next four years. Those roots trace back to his public withdrawal following the presidential election of 1860, as

¹⁰⁹ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, May 30, 1861.

¹¹⁰ Diary of Philemon Stout, July 4, 1861, Philemon Stout Collection, ALPLM.

¹¹¹ Mercy Levering Conkling to Clinton Conkling, July 4, 1861, Conkling Family Papers, ALPLM; J. Matthew Gallman, *The North Fights the Civil War: The Home Front* (Chicago: The American Way Series, 1994), 121.

the secession crisis tore the country apart, thus raising additional questions over how Springfield would fare during wartime.

CHAPTER TWO:
“THE APPEARANCE OF A MILITARY CAMP”:
WAR COMES TO SPRINGFIELD

Politics, more than anything else, connected Abraham Lincoln to Springfielders during the Civil War; but politics did not consume the lives of those in town during the four years of fighting. For areas across the North and the South, the war became a local concern requiring local handling. Little to no assistance from the federal government meant communities had to adapt to the war without much guidance. Springfield was no exception. This chapter examines the Civil War’s social and economic impact on Springfield. The war brought challenges to most Northern communities, but not all challenges were equal. Virtually every city and town sent men off to war, some never to return home. Springfield had its own share of loss, but it did not come close to experiencing what military historians describe as “total war.” Nonetheless, the city had its own set of issues, magnified by its centrality as the state’s military headquarters. The process of war-making hindered the community’s efforts to adapt to the rising currents of industrialism and widespread western migration. Multiple factors contributed to this dilemma, notably the town’s failure to adapt its economy to war and the postwar; the city’s inability to anticipate the influx of soldiers into the area; and the constant need to react and adapt to the changes that a long war creates. This chapter explores that history. By war’s end, local leaders worried over the city’s ability to reverse course.

Call for Volunteers

Four days before the federal surrender of Fort Sumter, the Springfield Light Artillery Company called an emergency meeting. Members had an uneasy feeling about the way national events were headed, so they held an election for new officers if the situation escalated to the

point requiring a military response. It turns out they were correct. When the news confirming Sumter had fallen under rebel control, *rage militaire* spread throughout Springfield and across the North. The next day Illinois's Adjutant General issued General Orders Number 1, notifying all members of the state militia "to hold themselves in readiness for service." The following day President Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 volunteers to serve for three months.¹ Recruiting tents sprung up around town and before the ramifications at Charleston Harbor had a chance to sink in, able-bodied men between eighteen and forty-five considered enlistment in one of the local militia units.

Across the North local men rushed to this call to arms. On April 16, Springfield's "Young America Hose and Engine Company No. 5" agreed to form "into a military company for the defense of the glorious stars and stripes," and "do hereby tender our service to the governor of the state of Illinois in accordance with the proclamation of President Lincoln."² Peer pressure prompted others to join. One soldier with the 1st Brigade wrote to his cousin in Springfield that those who delayed enlistment would regret their decision for "the war will be over without their seeing it."³ The call for volunteers, Springfield teenager Anna Ridgely penned in her diary, "has of course created great excitement among all gentlemen."⁴ Enthusiasm was so high that Springfield's Lutheran university struggled to maintain adequate enrollment numbers over the course of the war, just one explanation for the school's decline during the period.⁵

¹ *Daily Illinois State Register*, April 11, 1861.

² *Daily Illinois State Register*, April 17, 1861.

³ Will to "Cousin Addie," May 6, 1862, Bailhache-Brayman Collection, ALPLM.

⁴ Quinn, "Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War," 12.

⁵ Harry Evjen, "Illinois State University, 1852-1868," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 31, no. 1 (March 1938): 69.

At a “Grand Union Meeting” held at the State House three days after Sumter’s surrender, some of Illinois’s most prominent politicians addressed an anxious crowd. The gathering turned into a recruitment rally as men added their names to military rosters. John Cook, former Springfield mayor and current county sheriff, took the stage and offered his regiment’s services. Cook was commander of the Springfield Zouave Grays, the most recognized militia in the capital city. The Springfield Zouaves consisted largely of single men under the age of thirty, and they were organized into Illinois’s Seventh Infantry Regiment, the first state regiment mustered into service for the war. The Springfield National Guard was also part of the Seventh Infantry, meaning locals followed the actions of the Seventh with special care. The 114th Illinois Infantry also represented Springfield well, and all told, the town contributed just under 2,000 men to the war.⁶

Men across Illinois continued enlisting in the days after the “Grand Union Meeting,” eager to take part in this historic moment. After Lincoln’s call for troops, Governor Yates directed all males interested in joining to promptly make their way to Springfield, the “place of rendezvous,” and adding that “Companies will be received in the order in which their services are offered.”⁷ Trains carrying men began arriving on April 25, and the *Register* reported the capital “was on fire with enthusiasm.” Bands awaited each train’s arrival and “crowds rushed towards the depots to welcome the volunteers whose arrival had been previously announced by telegraph.” So many men from Illinois poured into Springfield that the Adjutant General’s office inside the State House required a guard due to the constant stream of men coming in and out.⁸

⁶ Quinn, "Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War," 136n199. The state began with the Seventh Infantry Regiment out of respect for the six Illinois regiments that served in the U.S.’s war with Mexico.

⁷ “GENERAL ORDERS NO. 2,” April 16, 1861, Richard Yates Collection, ALPLM.

⁸ *Daily Illinois State Register*, April 25, 1861.

Lincoln's call for 75,000 volunteers from across the loyal states was handily reached, and thousands of unfortunate men arrived in Illinois's capital city only to learn that the state's quota had already been filled. The state was authorized six thousand men, but Governor Yates was reluctant to turn away the nearly four thousand excess men who made the journey, so he insisted on retaining them. He informed Lincoln that ten regiments beyond the six allotted from Illinois would be "stationed at various points in the State, one in each Congressional District except the 6th in which there are two." He intended to keep these men in service for "30 days for the purpose of instruction and discipline unless sooner called into the service of the United States. If not required, they will be disbanded at the end of 30 days." But he hoped that would not be necessary, and he desired a prompt decision because these men "cost the state of Illinois perhaps ten thousand dollars a day and of course their early acceptance would save the State many thousands of dollars."⁹ By July, Yates was practically begging that these men be mustered into service. To Secretary of War Simon Cameron, he wrote:

"I have accepted another Regiment of 12 Companies of Cavalry. They are ready to march. Shall I rendezvous them for being mustered into service? Ten additional companies are also offered. Will you accept them? Two of the four Artillery Companies raised by the State have not yet been mustered into the service. Can they be mustered in?"¹⁰

Yates also worried over meeting the state's volunteer quota, aware that accepting more troops early in the war might offset potential deficiencies in the future. Better to make those sacrifices early on, he wrote to the new Secretary of State Edwin Stanton one year later. "Please inform me fully whether for excess of quota the State is to have credit on the number required for old

⁹ Richard Yates to Abraham Lincoln, May 15, 1861; Richard Yates to John A. McClernand, May 18, 1861, John A. McClernand Collection, ALPLM; Richard Yates to Simon Cameron, July 1861, Richard Yates Collection, ALPLM.

¹⁰ Richard Yates to Simon Cameron, July 1861, Richard Yates Collection, ALPLM.

Regiments now in the field, and also what is expected of us in such case as to drafting?”¹¹ Others interested in forming companies appealed directly to Lincoln, especially if they had a previous relationship with the president. James A. Barret informed his fellow Springfielder Lincoln he could “raise a Regiment of Volunteers ... composed mainly of the hardy sons of our farmers of this Region.” “For this reason you will pardon our temerity & boldness in making our application more directly to you instead of the War department.”¹²

Military Headquarters

The thousands of troops accepted into the Army and encamped in town, not to mention the excess number of recruits that remained in Springfield, brought unforeseen problems to the community. Put simply, the initial enthusiasm following their arrival gave way to actual wartime mobilization, and Springfield was simply unprepared for this task. For one thing, these men already belonged to a militia system notorious more for camaraderie than for military discipline, and they brought their unprofessional attitudes with them.¹³ Lincoln’s secretary John Nicolay advised Illinois’s Secretary of State that, “In getting up the Illinois troops look to efficiency – to perfection in drill, equipment &c. Have them ready for work and not for show.”¹⁴ Furthermore, when men reached Springfield they expected resources but were found wanting. On April 29, Ulysses S. Grant informed Yates that the State Armory contained over 900 forms of muskets and

¹¹ Richard Yates to E. M. Stanton, August 20, 1862, Richard Yates Collection, ALPLM.

¹² James A. Barret to Abraham Lincoln, July 30, 1861, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

¹³ S.R. Nelson and C. Sheriff, *A People at War: Civilians and Soldiers in America's Civil War, 1854-1877* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 65.

¹⁴ John G. Nicolay to Ozias M. Hatch, April 26, 1861, O. M. Hatch Collection, ALPLM.

rifles, few of which were in “serviceable condition.”¹⁵ Grant also thought the men under his new command “resembled an armed gang far more than they did a regiment.” The inability of federal and state officials to attain non-weaponry supplies to troops prompted commanding officers to procure them from local businesses.¹⁶

These problems persisted into the war’s second and third years. When a captain for the 23rd Army Corps arrived in Springfield in July 1862, he found “a considerable amount of stores on hand, but not assorted with reference to the wants of the troops ... especially was the lack of Camp Equipage foreseen to be a serious obstacle in the way of concentrating and organizing troops.” The captain believed it necessary to request goods from Washington “for the most needed articles, especially tents.”¹⁷ It was not uncommon after each new call for volunteers that men arriving in Springfield could expect to be “without tents, blankets, uniforms &c.”¹⁸

The most urgent task was determining where to station the thousands of recruits expected to descend on the Illinois capital. Springfield was unprepared for housing, training, and equipping troops coming from across the Prairie State, the majority already attached to units composed of men from the same community. The first arrivals organized in Springfield’s Concert Hall, the post office, the local armory, and closed businesses, but these were obviously temporary solutions. A more permanent option was the Sangamon County Agricultural Fairgrounds with its large open area for drilling and marching, or at least that was the

¹⁵ *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Twenty-Second General Assembly of the State of Illinois, at Their Second Session, Begun and Held at Springfield, April 23, 1861* (Springfield, Illinois: Bailhache & Baker, Printers, 1861), 62; “Proclamation by the Governor,” *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Twenty-Second General Assembly of the State of Illinois, at Their Second Session, Begun and Held at Springfield, April 23, 1861* (Springfield, Illinois: Bailhache & Baker, Printers, 1861), 10.

¹⁶ Brooks D. Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph Over Adversity, 1822-1865* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 83-84; Nelson and Sheriff, *A People at War*, 67.

¹⁷ William H. Bailhache to Brigadier General Montgomery Meigs, October 20, 1863, Bailhache-Brayman Collection, ALPLM.

¹⁸ Richard Yates to Major General H. G. Wright, August 24, 1862, Richard Yates Collection, ALPLM.

assumption. Equine stalls served as makeshift barracks, each compartment housing up to eight men since they were “sufficiently large [enough] for two horses.” Hay was liberally applied to carpet the ground for walkways, fitting rooms, and bunks. The installation was designated Camp Yates in honor of the Illinois commander-in-chief.¹⁹

Few could fail to envisage the problems with this arrangement and how combined they would exacerbate the tension between soldiers and civilians. For one, the grounds were too small to accommodate the vast number of organized troops arriving daily, not including thousands of others who showed up hoping to latch onto one of the state’s six regiments stemming from the first-come, first-serve policy. Some regiments relocated to sheds in a nearby brickyard when the camp could no longer quarter any more soldiers. Secondly, Camp Yates was less than one mile from the City Square, a short walk for volunteers wanting to explore their new surroundings. Lastly, state leaders turned away many more men than they anticipated, leaving Springfield with a vast pool of rejected enlistees hanging around the area with little to preoccupy their time. Some returned home or left Springfield to find another route into the military, but others lingered with the hope that they would somehow wind up in the service.²⁰ Locals sustained theft and damage to their property, especially those near the camp shortly after the visitors began congregating in the area. Hardly a night passed when individuals “of some reckless character” attempted “to enter the houses of our quiet citizens [and] take advantage of the large crowd of strangers at present in Springfield and hope thereby to carry out their unlawful purposes, unwhipt of justice,”

¹⁹ *Daily Illinois State Register*, April 20, 1861; Quinn, "Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War," 14; William S. Peterson, "A History of Camp Butler, 1861-1866," *Illinois Historical Journal* 82, no. 2 (Summer 1989): 75.

²⁰ Richard Yates to Abraham Lincoln, May 15, 1861; Richard Yates to John A. McClernand, May 18, 1861, John A. McClernand Collection, ALPLM; Richard Yates to Simon Cameron, July 1861, Richard Yates Collection, ALPLM; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Twenty-Second General Assembly of the State of Illinois, at Their Second Session, Begun and Held at Springfield, April 23, 1861* (Springfield, Illinois: Bailhache & Baker, Printers, 1861), 26-7; Nelson and Sheriff, *A People at War*, 196.

Springfield's Democratic organ claimed. And locals could expect little reprieve as long as troops continued to crowd into camp along with "the unavoidable hangers on who don the soldier's uniform."²¹

Whether accepted into the ranks or not, these visitors took advantage of their newfound freedom from home. On a mid-May evening in 1861, two members of the Springfield Zouaves "got on a bender [and] hired two fast horses and concluded to try their speed" on one of the city's busier streets. Five days later, law authorities detained a pair of drunken soldiers for throwing rocks at a local hostel "and using language calculated to provoke a breach of the peace towards the inmates."²² The matter worsened in later years when soldiers returned from the battlefield as hardened veterans who felt entitled to act irresponsibly, described below.

Some in town proposed strengthening the local police force, but with so many men "gone to the wars" it was a challenge to keep local law enforcement adequately outfitted. Furthermore, those police who remained were reluctant to arrest volunteers for fear of being perceived unpatriotic. Law authorities handed out mild citations for unlawful soldier behavior, as was the case of one volunteer taken in on charges of drunkenness and disorderly conduct. "As he happens to be a recruit, enlisted for the three years' service," the *Register* acknowledged, "it is to be presumed that he will be released before the time of his confinement shall have expired."²³

The commanders at Camp Yates also struggled to rein in their troops. Officers placed guards armed with clubs around the edge of the site to prevent soldiers from wandering off the campgrounds. This was a mildly effective precaution. Another challenge was the nonstop arrival of men into the city for those first two months after Sumter. It was virtually impossible to instill

²¹ *Daily Illinois State Register*, May 7, 1861; Quinn, "Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War," 14.

²² *Daily Illinois State Register*, May 13, 18, 1861.

²³ *Daily Illinois State Register*, April 25, May 7, July 27, 1861.

military discipline into troops and prepare them for combat with both commanders and soldiers filtering in and out of the region. Captain Ulysses S. Grant, one of the post's first commanders, served for less than one week before being reassigned to Southern Illinois to muster and organize regiments into service down there. During his brief command Grant enforced discipline by holding three drill sessions per day (two on Sunday) and placing individuals in confinement for disobeying his orders. These tactics worked, but they did not carry over once his successor replaced him. Grant later returned to Springfield, not to reassume control at Camp Yates, but to take control of his own regiment – he had little interest managing troops outside his command.²⁴

The surprising Union military defeat at the Battle of Bull Run in July 1861 brought further changes, not least was Lincoln's second call for an additional 500,000 volunteers. The majority of Illinois men that fell under this call would be sent to Springfield or Camp Douglas in Chicago, the two largest military installations in Illinois. Given the added stress this influx of men would put on the Springfield community, local leaders urged transferring recruits to a new location in the vicinity. They preferred a site still near the state's military headquarters yet "sufficient distance from the city to prevent dissipation and violations of discipline" stemming from area volunteers. A select committee settled on an area roughly six miles northeast of Springfield and named it Camp Butler, after State Treasurer William Butler. The fifty-acre site bordered a lake and river and provided expansive space for training. It also rested near the Great Western Railroad line that ran from Chicago to Springfield, thus providing accessible transport

²⁴ *Daily Illinois State Register*, May 9, June 18, 1861; Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph Over Adversity, 1822-1865*, 84.

of soldiers and equipment to and from the camp. By war's end more than two-thirds of the state's 170 regiments would come through Camp Butler.²⁵

Unfortunately the camp suffered from numerous problems throughout the war years because of its hasty setup. It was often overcrowded and soldiers were sometimes forced to sleep in tents on the campgrounds. One volunteer estimated that approximately 15,000 soldiers were in camp in August 1863, and there "would be more if they had tents and camp equipage." On two occasions the camp guarded Confederate prisoners, and these men had the worst accommodations of all. One prisoner mockingly pointed out his fortune securing "a room on the ground floor, and my room is strictly private as I have only ONE – hundred and seventeen room mates." Anyone else – prisoner or otherwise – lucky enough to secure a cot and some rest had little else to brag about. A report taken by the Assistant Surgeon of the Army in 1862 found the barracks were "mere shells, single boards forming the sides" and the roofs covered with "tarred paper." Rain seeped through and forced Thomas Pankey to wrap up a letter to his wife quicker than he originally planned. "Sallie you cant imagine how comfortable it is to be fast asleep and as wet as a drownded rat in minutes but that would be nothing if it was all."²⁶

When the three-year veterans returned in 1864, those who remained in Springfield for any length of time had the option of finding quarter in the camp's decrepit conditions or use "the bare ground for a bed and the cold sky for a covering, rather than enter their stenchy huts."

Approximately 2,000 drafted men and substitutes that year formed a makeshift site they dubbed

²⁵ Mark Hubbard, ed. *Illinois's War: The Civil War in Documents*, The Civil War in the Great Interior (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2013), 57-58; Peterson, "A History of Camp Butler, 1861-1866," 75; Camilla A. Quinn, "Soldiers on Our Streets: The Effects of a Civil War Military Camp on the Springfield Community," *ibid.* 86, no. 4 (1993): 246.

²⁶ John Lindsey to Nancy, August 27, 1863, John Lindsey Collection, ALPLM; Thomas L. Pankey to Wife, September 7, 1862, Thomas L. Pankey Collection, ALPLM; Bell Irvin Wiley, ed. *Fourteen Hundred and 91 Days in the Confederate Army: A Journal Kept by W. W. Heartsill, For Four Years, One Month, and One Day, or, Camp Life: Day-by-Day, of the W. P. Lane Rangers, from April 19th, 1861, to May 20th, 1865* (W. W. Heartsill, 1876), 106.

“Substitute Camp” due to Butler’s deplorable accommodations. “I am not disposed to complain,” one soldier wrote to the governor, “but if this state of things cannot be remedied, it does seem to me that some of us should be shipped from here as soon as possible.” Most camps built during the war routinely suffered from disorder, discomfort, and messiness, but most expected these shortcomings while in the field preparing for battle, not when drilling or back home on furlough.²⁷

Persistent boredom encouraged some soldiers to risk escape, yet others tried to cope with the camp’s environment, often unsuccessfully. One volunteer was so bored that he vowed to leave his “Regament” and board a Gun Boat where he was bound to see some action. “A fellow cant die but wonsel and so I think I migh as well die a young man as an oald man.” “We don’t have much to do to Pass away time here,” another wrote home. “The most of the boys pass away their time in Playing cards and danceing but [I] Prefer Putting my time Reading and Singing and Writeing When there aint so much nois!” The commotion turned others off, with one soldier concluding “Camp Butler ain’t a place of the greatest morels in the world,” while another found his fellow volunteers “so lewd & wicked” that he had difficulty choosing “a companion from among them all.”²⁸

The prospect of escaping to Springfield did not appeal to all troops. One soldier believed he had been stationed in the most foul part of Illinois, proclaiming, “It is enough to make the biggest drunkard in the state reform to be here a while and see how they cary on.” Many men

²⁷ James Renfro to Richard Yates, October 21, 1864, Yates Collection, ALPLM; H. W. Freedley to William Hoffman, found in Helen Edith Sheppley, “Camp Butler in the Civil War Days,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 25, no. 4 (January 1933): 308-309. Nelson and Sheriff, *A People at War*, 214.

²⁸ Alexander Harper to Family, April 2, 1862, October 21, December 5, 1863, John and Alexander Harper Collection, ALPLM; James F. Drish to Wife, July 1, 1863, James F. Drish Collection, ALPLM; Diary of James A. Black, January 13, 1862, James Black Collection, ALPLM; John Will Lindsey to Nancy, August 23, 1862, John Will Lindsey Collection, ALPLM; Presley T. Peek to “Friends,” August 20, 27, 1862, Camp Butler Collection, Sangamon Valley Collection; William R. Wyllie to Wife, January 26, February 8, 1863, William R. Wyllie Collection, ALPLM.

lingered in the city patronizing the saloons and drinking themselves into a stupor after marching to town to receive their pay. Officers sometimes wondered if an individual who failed to make roll-call had actually deserted due to frustration with military life or because he was merely on a bender. Alcohol unsurprisingly made its way inside the camp, and one volunteer wrote in his diary that the camp was “infested with peddlers of all kinds.” Soldiers who shunned alcohol had limited options to occupy their down time.²⁹

The soldiers’ removal six miles from town brought a renewed sense of normalcy to Springfield residents. Indeed, transferring soldiers from Camp Yates to Camp Butler removed one of the few visible signs of war from Springfielders. That said, despite the negative opinions associated with soldiers in the area, locals found something alluring about these visitors who enlisted to fight in defense of the Union. They were a novelty to Springfielders in spite of their nuisance behavior. Not long after recruits began descending into the region, one local man conceived a moneymaking opportunity to transport anyone eager to catch a glimpse of the soldiers from the downtown hotel district to Camp Yates. Anna Ridgely took advantage of this opportunity, saying, “It was quite amusing to me to see the men in their quarters. it is the first camp life I have ever seen. the men seemed very happy cooking their potatoes and playing leapfrog.” Another visitor to the camp described the men as “a good looking set of fellows, lacking military discipline and science, but *good looking* withal.”³⁰

Camp Butler began housing Confederate prisoners following Union military victories in Tennessee in early 1862, providing locals with another incentive to visit the installation.

Governor Yates initially worried about captured soldiers held in the region, expressing his

²⁹ John Will Lindsey to Nancy, August 23, 26, 1862, John Will Lindsey Collection, ALPLM; Nelson and Sheriff, *A People at War*, 217. Sheppley, "Camp Butler in the Civil War Days," 295.

³⁰ *Daily Illinois State Register*, April 26, May 6, 1861; Quinn, "Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War," 15; Gallman, *The North Fights the Civil War*, 16.

concern to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, “We think it unsafe to send prisoners to Springfield, Ill.; there are so many secessionists at that place.”³¹ Others thought differently. Some of Springfield’s most prominent Republicans, including Jacob Bunn and John Williams, believed that it was the duty of a state capital to house prisoners. In their letter to Yates, they argued:

Aside from any pecuniary benefits which may accrue from the location of that Camp here, there is a peculiar fitness that the Capitol of the State, which is the Head Quarter’s of the Commander in Chief, should also be his military centre and rendezvous. This is the case in other states without exception and there is no reason why Springfield should not continue to share the same distinction.³²

Yates’s opinion had changed one month after conveying his concern and he wrote to General Henry Halleck offering to house additional prisoners.³³ The camp also guarded captured Confederate soldiers in 1863, remaining there for roughly three to four months each time.

The Republican-leaning *Journal* described the prisoners as “grotesque,” but encouraged Springfielders to show benevolence to the visitors. “Let us kill with kindness what we did not kill with bullets.”³⁴ Yet these Southern prisoners suffered from disease, filthy barracks, and the intensity of a hard Central Illinois winter. The last prisoners (not in the hospital) departed April 10, 1863, and the camp did not take in further enemy combatants afterward. Camp Butler held a combined 5,178 Confederate soldiers, 866 of whom died and were buried there.³⁵

Camp Butler brought relief to the Springfield community and masked the city’s poor preparation for war in light of its excitement following Sumter. The camp’s construction also

³¹ Richard Yates, O. M. Hatch, and Jesse K. Dubois to Edwin Stanton, February 18, 1862, United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1898), series 2, volume 3, 277.

³² Jacob Bunn, John Williams, Rob Irwin, Thomas Condell, and John Armstrong to Richard Yates, Date Unknown, Yates Collection, ALPLM.

³³ Richard Yates to Major General Halleck, March 18, 1862, Yates Collection, ALPLM.

³⁴ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, February 24, 1862.

³⁵ Camilla A. Corlas Quinn, "Forgotten Soldiers: The Confederate Prisoners at Camp Butler 1862-1863," *Illinois Historical Journal* 81, no. 1 (1988): 37-38, 42-44.

provided early economic opportunities for local vendors, but these eventually dropped off as did the protection that Camp Butler initially provided Springfield residents. New wartime developments demanded that community groups and local organizations step up at the expense of economic development.

Mobilizing the Home Front

The soldier problems of 1861 reemerged in 1864 with the return of the three-year veterans. These men, the first to answer the call to arms after Sumter, returned to Illinois either to reorganize into new regiments or discharge altogether. Those planning to reenlist were rewarded with a thirty-day furlough before returning to the frontlines. The town prepared a homecoming celebration ahead of each successive regiment's arrival for their men in uniform. As his train pulled into the city, a member of the Seventh Illinois was heartened to see such a "vast crowd of people were there to welcome us home." After dinner and a good night's rest, soldiers typically left the following morning for home at the earliest opportunity, eager to join the company of loved ones not seen in years.³⁶ Others lingered around town for days in order to prolong the festive atmosphere following their return to the home front. They fearlessly wandered the city streets with a sense of entitlement and extra cash in their pockets. Some flaunted their Army-issued weapons in public to the dismay of locals in the area. The old problems from 1861 no longer felt so distant.³⁷

Business revived for the local saloons and brothels. Soldiers craving a taste of alcohol had many options in the capital city, but the jubilant homecoming environment – combined with, as one soldier pointed out, "unequal proportions of whisky" after a long abstinence from liquor –

³⁶ Henry H. Baltzall, January 15, 1864, diary entry, Henry H. Baltzall Collection, ALPLM.

³⁷ Angle, *"Here I Have Lived"*, 282-283.

proved disastrous. Furloughed and newly discharged soldiers continued their merriment on the streets of Springfield since nearby Camp Butler prohibited all forms of liquor. A riot broke out one evening in early February after a group of soldiers destroyed mirrors and glass from multiple downtown bars and a major hotel.³⁸

The city's brothels likewise saw increased business activity during the war. This was true for cities and other large transport areas across the North: men in the military sought out new adventures and risks the moment they enlisted, and financially-strapped women on the home front were forced to find alternative ways to support themselves due to the absence of men off at war.³⁹ Yet despite their rise in business, the new clientele partaking in these establishments was often less generous than regulars owing to the veterans' brief stay in the region. The brothel known as Fort Taylor experienced both the good and bad of this military intrusion. The establishment's owners, Harvey and Lucinda Taylor, operated their house in the town's second ward, the section of Springfield often known as "the sinkhole of the city" based on the large number of bawdy houses in the area. The Taylors' business grew steadily before the war but the couple and their employed women constantly found themselves in trouble with local authorities.⁴⁰

Fort Taylor earned its nickname and reputation in 1861 after the first sets of soldiers reached town, but it saw its highest profits with the return of the three-year veterans in 1864. It

³⁸ Quinn, "Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War," 62-63.

³⁹ Nelson and Sheriff, *A People at War*, 214; Reid Mitchell, *The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 6; Judith Giesberg, *Army at Home: Women and the Civil War on the Northern Home Front* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 64-65. J. Matthew Gallman has pointed out that this problem existed throughout Illinois. Citizens in Chicago routinely complained of prostitution activity and other social evils created by the war, and city leaders in Jacksonville gave law officials expanded authority to crack down on houses that offered sex for money. See Gallman, *The North Fights the Civil War*, 90.

⁴⁰ Curtis Mann, "Fort Taylor," *Historico: The Newsletter of the Sangamon County Historical Society*, 2008. I would like to thank the author for bringing this episode to my attention.

had developed a reputation and consequently attracted more soldiers than it could handle. When a gang of promiscuous volunteers was outraged over the services they had received one February evening, the men exacted revenge on the house and forced the Taylors to close their doors temporarily. The couple never recovered as they faced further crackdowns and legal problems towards the war's end. "The establishment presided over by the evil genius known as Harvey Taylor was completely gutted," one local reporter noted. "A desirable result but accomplished in an unlawful and much to be condemned manner."⁴¹

The breaking point between soldier and civilian relations occurred in mid-May 1864, with an affair that brought Springfield closer to riot than at any other point during the war. John M. Phillips, a member of the furloughed Springfield Zouave Company, was suspected of allegedly raping a young girl. Phillips, after a morning of drinking and then hiring a horse carriage, approached a ten-year-old girl and offered her a ride home. The young woman agreed, but soon found herself two miles outside the city limits where Phillips "attempted to commit one of the most horrible and brutal outrages upon her person known in the annals of crime." Phillips later drove back to town, dropped her off, then returned the carriage and could not stop boasting about how he "played h-ll with one preacher's daughter." Phillips's braggadocio eventually landed him in police custody. Authorities eventually determined he had never carried out the act, but they still held him on kidnapping charges.⁴² While confined, Eugene P. Clover, the victim's older brother, got a clear view of Phillips and fired six shots at the soldier, one hitting Phillips in the thigh that proved fatal.⁴³

⁴¹ Mann, "Fort Taylor."

⁴² Quinn, "Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War," 65.

⁴³ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, May 12, 1864.

The Republican *Journal* worried that the event had become “a stain upon the fame of our city,” and resolved that Phillips’s biggest crime was being a “man in soldier’s clothes” suspected of raping a young female.⁴⁴ Only five months earlier residents had celebrated Phillips’s regiment for its service to the Union. He now represented everything that frustrated Springfielders who had grown tired of soldiers stationed near their homes. But the affair, while heinous, was the exception and not the rule. This was a rare instance when tension in town dissolved into chaos.

As they had in 1861, political and military leaders tried to rein in this revived soldier misbehavior, but with limited success. Governor Yates appealed to furloughed soldiers and veterans – who “engaged in conduct unbecoming the profession of arms” – to adhere to the “teachings of Christianity” while in town but off duty.⁴⁵ The City Council expanded the police force from ten to twelve officers patrolling the streets, but that only proved a small hindrance to soldiers who had faced far more formidable obstacles at Shiloh and Vicksburg.⁴⁶ Realizing this modest error, the council increased the nighttime force to 100 men, but most were volunteer civilians deputized by local authorities.⁴⁷ Military commanders prohibited soldiers from carrying firearms inside the city limits and barred soldiers from leaving Camp Butler unless they had a pass specifying “urgent and special business,” even placing patrol guards along the downtown streets to lookout for offenders. They threatened to arrest, revoke one’s furlough, and imprison any soldier in the Camp Butler guard house for acting “in an improper manner” while walking

⁴⁴ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, May 12, 1864.

⁴⁵ Richard Yates and others “To the People and the Veteran Volunteers and furloughed soldiers of Illinois,” February 1864, Yates Collection, ALPLM.

⁴⁶ Quinn, “Soldiers on Our Streets,” 253.

⁴⁷ Quinn, “Lincoln’s Springfield in the Civil War,” 64, 122. Compare this with the credit J. Matthew Gallman bestowed on Philadelphia’s mayor and the city’s antebellum experiences in preserving order during the war. See J. Matthew Gallman, *Northerners at War: Reflections on the Civil War Home Front* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 2010), 39.

the Springfield streets. But the constant stream of men returning home made it difficult to enforce these rules. Military leaders had to repeat them whenever a train transporting new veterans arrived, and it was difficult targeting would-be agitators. Army leaders had as much luck keeping tabs on furloughed veterans as did city and state officials.⁴⁸

The best solution came from regular local citizens. They proposed construction of a Soldier's Home that would provide alternative accommodations to the large number of troops constantly streaming in and out of the region. The development of soldiers' homes was nothing new by 1864, not even in Illinois. They already appeared in cities and towns throughout the North that served as waystations for soldiers passing through, but few were designed for long-term usage.⁴⁹ The first known home to appear in the state was located in Centralia, a town in southeast Illinois. It provided temporary medical attention to the large number of injured or ill soldiers coming through the town's major railroad depot. Others, such as the one built in Springfield, operated primarily as a rest area that fed and offered soldiers a place to sleep before moving on.⁵⁰ The home in Springfield catered to those regiments that arrived late, often between 9:00 p.m. and midnight, long after most restaurants had closed for the evening and too late to begin the six-mile march to Camp Butler for a sleeping cot. John R. Woods, secretary of the Illinois State Sanitary Commission and friend of Lincoln, informed the president of its benefits. Troops who took advantage of the home found a restful night's sleep and left the next morning "refreshed, sober, and with salutary impressions," fit for the next day's duties and "saved from

⁴⁸ Quinn, "Soldiers on Our Streets," 254-255; Quinn, "Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War," 64.

⁴⁹ Homes appeared in other parts of the state, including Chicago, Cairo, and most likely in smaller areas, though no records of their existence survives aside from contemporary references to them during the period. Glenna R. Schroeder-Lein, "'Your work is truly a good one': Illinoisans and Soldiers' Homes during the Civil War," *Journal of Illinois History* 12, no. 3 (2009): 195-196, 198. I am grateful to the author for bringing this issue to my attention.

⁵⁰ Gallman, *The North Fights the Civil War*, 112.

the sharppers and rascals who infest cities like this, and are ever ready to prey upon the poor fellows.”⁵¹

The home opened on April 25, and though leading men in the area directed the building’s development and provided the initial funding, the task of caring for the incoming soldiers came from Springfield’s voluntary associations, made up almost exclusively of women. Before the building’s location had been finalized, the *Illinois State Journal* wanted to see the project “placed in charge of the patriotic ladies of this city.” Women were:

perfectly competent to make it just what it should be, a place where the soldiers returning to their homes or on their way to the field, can obtain a night’s rest and a meal of victuals. We say put the Home under the supervision of a committee of ladies, for the reason that we believe wherever the military or a committee of gentlemen have had the management, the institution has proved a failure,” the paper editorialized.⁵²

This was not a new development in 1864. When details of Fort Sumter’s surrender reached town in 1861, residents overwhelmingly felt a desire to contribute to the imminent war beyond traditional military and political networks. Several joined voluntary groups, especially women forced into taking a larger role in home front mobilization. The Soldiers’ Aid Society was one of the first organizations to emerge, and the group – composed of women with male leadership – initially met once per week to assemble and sew uniforms for Illinois soldiers. The middle-class women who made up this association drew upon social networks developed during the antebellum period.⁵³ “We have had a real jolly time making Havelock caps,” Mercy Conkling, one of the society’s leaders, recalled early in the war. “We made ninety of them, and

⁵¹ John R. Woods to Edward M. Stanton, October 12, 1865, *Second annual report of Transactions of the Illinois State Sanitary Commission, from January 1, 1864, to January 1, 1865* (Springfield: Baker & Phillips, Printers, 1865), 6-8; *Second annual report of Transactions of the Illinois State Sanitary Commission, from January 1, 1864, to January 1, 1865* (Springfield: Baker & Phillips, Printers, 1865), 4-10; John R. Woods to Abraham Lincoln, June 20, 1864, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

⁵² *Daily Illinois State Journal*, March 10, 1864.

⁵³ Jeanie Attie, *Patriotic Toil: Northern Women and the American Civil War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 33-34.

each one took home a number, so that we have them completed, ready to send to night to Cairo. We have some patriotism among our ladies!” The group began meeting daily after the major Western battles in early 1862 and shifted to producing bandages and linens for injured Illinois soldiers. The organization raised funds and requested goods such as food, bedding, and bandages from people throughout town, with the hope “nothing is wasted” that might benefit the troops. By 1862, requests went out to surrounding areas as the people in Springfield were “pretty well begged out of everything they can spare.” The Soldier’s Aid Society and the Soldier’s Home provided opportunities for women to demonstrate their support for the war, and they did so in the voluntary spirit embedded in the country during the nineteenth century.⁵⁴

The construction of Camp Butler, the Soldier’s Aid Society, and the Soldier’s Home all served in a temporary capacity. The only long-term project Springfield pursued that lasted beyond the war was establishment of a Home for the Friendless, and individuals in town with both Northern and Southern backgrounds supported its efforts. The idea of Springfield serving as a haven for refugees emerged in late 1862. Longtime resident Francis Springer, while serving in Arkansas with the 10th Illinois Calvary, was tasked with providing food, shelter, and clothing to widows, orphans, refugees, and freed and escaped slaves arriving at Fort Smith.⁵⁵ The sight of so many refugees left a marked impression on Springer. He saw families without fathers enter the camp desiring food, shelter, and protection. These refugees left homes that had been burned-down, and Springer described the “long train of luckless things” that followed his regiment as families that had:

⁵⁴ Mercy Levering Conkling to Clinton Conkling, June 8, October 14, 1861, February 12, 1862, Conkling Family Collection, ALPLM; Emma Clark to Unknown, November 10, 1862, John Lindsay Harris Collection, ALPLM; Hubbard, *Illinois's War*, 59; Gallman, *The North Fights the Civil War*, 16-17.

⁵⁵ Furry, *The Preacher's Tale*, xi, xviii.

fled from their homes to escape the ravages of the Rebs. It would have been far better for them if they had staid at home. They are an encumbrance to the soldiers, annoying to our excellent colonel & a misery to their selves. They present the appearance of a suffering gang of half-fed, half-clad, & uninstructed army scavengers,--innocent enough, but shiftless & thriftless.... The little sufferers,-- how I do pity them & their mother too, as they trudge along amidst clouds of dust & the blazing heat of the quiet atmosphere. Children more tenderly cared for in a quiet & well-regulated home could not be so exposed & live.”⁵⁶

Soldiers offered these refugees food rations provided by “the ample commissaries of Uncle Sam” and the families continued living in their wagons in campgrounds or in “tents made... in the ground.”⁵⁷

The heavy volume of refugees entering the camp became too burdensome to manage. The constant stream of suffering men, women, and children into Fort Smith prevented Union troops from performing their drills, and there were too few resources to provide for both soldiers and Southern refugees. Not wanting to leave them suffering, however, Springer considered shipping these refugees to places that could better care for them. Aware that the Soldier’s Aid Society had a history of taking in local women and children who had lost fathers and husbands to the war and intimately familiar with Springfield having lived there for years before enlisting, Springer coordinated with individuals in the city and the state and established a system of sending refugees north where they would receive appropriate attention and better care from the home front.⁵⁸

The city was again unprepared for this latest war development, and it provided no help to the local economy, but the Home was the least partisan of Springfield’s wartime organizations. Unlike the Soldier’s Aid Society and the Soldier’s Home, both of which were dominated by

⁵⁶ Ibid, 62.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 52; Mary E. Humphrey, "Springfield Home for the Friendless," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 20, no. 1 (April 1927): 138-139.

⁵⁸ Furry, *The Preacher's Tale*, xi, xix; Humphrey, "Springfield Home for the Friendless," 138-139.

Republican supporters, the Home for the Friendless illustrated that the town was “not all lost in the vortex of passion and of party.” Everyone in town, regardless of political affiliation, championed aid for poor and destitute refugee families.⁵⁹ Anna Ridgely, the teenager from a prominent Democratic household in Springfield, split her limited spare time assisting wartime benefits, visiting soldiers, and helping at the Home for the Friendless. She was proud of her community’s response to this crisis, but saddened by what she saw. “They were all poor people and most of them sick from cold and exposure.”⁶⁰

Despite early setbacks the Home for the Friendless served as a physical reminder of the Civil War’s impact on the Springfield community, operating until 1928 when it changed its name to the Children’s Service League. By the late twentieth-century it served as the Child and Family Service and then the Family Service Center of Sangamon County, continuing to provide relief for orphans and families struggling with various difficulties.⁶¹

Fighting and Dying

While wartime and home front mobilizations were wrapped up in the excitement of the initial call for troops, Springfield did not experience war’s tragic side until 1862. The city had the “appearance of a military camp,” Mercy Conkling recalled in 1861, but had been spared the hardships from that first year of fighting. Townspeople followed the movements of Illinois soldiers serving in Cairo, Illinois and neighboring Missouri, and were relieved to identify few familiar names on lists of the dead. At the end of the year two Springfield soldiers had died from wounds received in battle and a few more from disease and accidents. Out of a population of

⁵⁹ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, March 14, 1863.

⁶⁰ Corneau, "A Girl in the Sixties," 441.

⁶¹ Mary E. Humphrey, "Springfield Home for the Friendless," *ibid.* 20, no. 1 (April 1927).

nearly ten thousand in 1860, these figures paled compared to the spike in deaths the following year as fighting in the West escalated.

A string of Union military victories in Tennessee in 1862 renewed wartime enthusiasm. The first reports reached Springfield in early February that Northern forces had overtaken Fort Henry along the Tennessee River. Ten days later, on February 16, news arrived that Union troops had forced the Confederate surrender of Fort Donelson, twelve miles east of Fort Henry. In April, the largest and most noteworthy battle of the war yet occurred at Shiloh, and Union troops there had again proven victorious. Celebrations erupted on the streets and at the State House where bonfires lit the night sky and residents congratulated each other. Each victory convinced inhabitants that the war's conclusion might be near. The Southern army's retreat from Tennessee, the editor of the *Journal* predicted, "opens the very heart of secessia to our victorious army, who will speedily divide or sunder the rebellious States, and bring them again under the old flag of the Union."⁶² Any frustration lingering from the previous year's setbacks disappeared with these Union victories in the West.

Shortly after reports from these battles reached town – whether in 1862, in 1863 with the fall of Vicksburg, or in 1864 with the capture of Atlanta, where Illinois soldiers each played a role – excitement gave way to fear over the number of casualties. Lists of the dead always followed the battle's outcome and readers scanned the newspapers and telegraph reports for names of the fallen in the days and weeks after a battle. When news was slow to arrive, "curiosity deepened into anxiety."⁶³ Springfielders, as with most communities throughout the country, were unprepared for the prospect of wartime death and how much suffering the loss of

⁶² *Daily Illinois State Journal*, February 18, 1862.

⁶³ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, February 8, 1862.

local men brought to the community. Funeral services for fallen soldiers commonly drew hundreds of residents who wanted to mourn those who had sacrificed their lives for the Union.⁶⁴

The number of casualties from the Battle of Shiloh was especially troubling for the town, two months after the breakthroughs at Forts Henry and Donelson. These military victories had been “accompanied with great mourning. So many of our Illinois troops being engaged in those terrible battles,” Mercy Conkling recalled. She wondered, “has not her sons born a large share in our struggles!”⁶⁵ Others such as Anthony L. Knapp, Springfield’s Democratic Representative in Congress, worried “that a few more such victories would end us up.”⁶⁶ The sorrow was too much for the teenage Anna Ridgely who grew tired of the heartrending news of fallen soldiers. “The earth is full of our Rachels weeping for their children, fathers mourning their sons and helpless babies vainly calling on their fathers slain. God be merciful and let this carnage cease.” Ridgely was especially shaken by the death of her hometown friend Arthur Bailhache. When she learned of Bailhache’s passing in early 1862, she “went slowly up into my own room, locked the door and sat down perfectly stunned. I could not believe it... I could not weep no only groan and moan and think of Arthur. I fell asleep and thought of him all the time and awaked often in the night saying it cannot be it cannot be.” Only by visiting his remains could she muster the ability to cry after “gaz[ing] upon that sweet face.” In an effort to turn this sorrow into something useful, Ridgely began attending the Soldier’s Aid Society in town and helped prepare bandages for Illinois soldiers fighting in the South.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Gallman, *The North Fights the Civil War*, 16; Quinn, "Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War," 25-27. The impact and legacy of death from the Civil War is best explored in Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).

⁶⁵ Mercy Conkling to Clinton Conkling, February 24, April 14, 1862, Conkling Family Collection, ALPLM.

⁶⁶ A. L. Knapp to Charles Lanphier, April 21, 1862, Lanphier Collection, ALPLM.

⁶⁷ Diary of Anna Ridgely Hudson, Anna Ridgely Hudson Collection, ALPLM; Corneau, "A Girl in the Sixties," 423-424.

Others had a different reaction. Some determined to travel south and visit loved ones to make sure they were okay. Few, however, could afford the cost of bringing a loved one home for burial or to visit them without financial assistance, especially mothers anxious to find their sons. Bridget O’Conner requested funding from the governor so she could travel to Tennessee and bring her fourteen-year old son serving with the Seventh Illinois Infantry home. But “being poor,” this “afflicted mother” pleaded to accompany the governor’s group of volunteer physicians and nurses headed to Shiloh so she could recover her “lost and erring child.”⁶⁸ O’Conner found her son still alive, but he refused to return home with her and remained in the service until the end of the war. Another Springfield mother, identifying herself as “Mrs. Hall,” also requested a pass from Governor Yates to visit her youngest son after Shiloh. He was sick, she informed Yates, and “would not ask for free pass to go if I had the means.”⁶⁹ Similar requests came after the Union Army’s capture of Vicksburg in 1863 but slowed afterward. The grief of losing hometown volunteers to the casualties of war was certainly not an exception for the citizens of Springfield, but that would change in 1865 when its most recognized resident joined the ranks of the fallen.

Wartime Economy?

The conflict’s early years brought mixed results to Springfield’s economy. Various businesses profited off initial wartime mobilization, and the opening of a munitions factory in 1861 provided employment opportunities for many women and children in town. Yet the city’s economy remained tethered to agriculture that was hurt by recurring droughts in the region. The war thwarted city development and growth after four years of fighting; compared with other

⁶⁸ Bridget O’Conner to Richard Yates, April 28, 1862, Richard Yates Collection, ALPLM.

⁶⁹ Mrs. Hall to Richard Yates, June 3, 1862, Richard Yates Collection, ALPLM.

Illinois communities experiencing rapid population growth and benefitting economically from industry and business tied to the conflict, this put the capital city's fate at risk.

It did not begin this way. One week after the shelling on Fort Sumter, Illinois officials opened a munitions factory in town to produce ammunition and explosives. Worried over the scarce and poorly maintained arms available to Illinois troops preparing for war and with the majority of military arsenals located in the East, Illinois leaders took it upon themselves to equip their state's soldiers for battle. Production in the facility also provided a boost to the local economy as the arsenal opened up employment opportunities. At its peak in August 1861 the facility had nearly 140 workers producing 25,000 and 50,000 musket and rifle cartridges per day. Continued growth over the next few months forced production to expand to other buildings in town.⁷⁰

Women and children made up a majority of the workforce despite the danger inherent in such labor. These were the spouses, children, and relatives of soldiers, "many of whom are strictly dependent upon their labor for their support." Though considered a nice gesture, owners could – and did – pay women a lower wage than men, the former earning, on average, fifty-five cents pay per day while their male counterparts averaged sixty-four cents. Children received even less, sometimes just over thirty-three cents for a ten-hour workday. This encouraged employers to hire more women and children in order to keep wages low. Managers justified this setup by arguing that in addition to "helping in the maintenance of their mothers and their younger brothers and sisters" during this trying period, children were also "acquir[ing] habits of

⁷⁰ Mark R. Wilson, *The Business of Civil War: Military Mobilization and the State, 1861-1865* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 13; Hubbard, *Illinois's War*, 57.

industry and bec[oming] accustomed to a discipline that will have its salutary effect upon the formation of their characters.”⁷¹

With federal funding, owners purchased raw materials from local vendors in order to manufacture their final products, creating a financial cycle for a community still partially reeling from the Panic of 1857. The arsenal’s operations contributed to the “good quantity of gold and silver in our city,” the *Journal* inferred in the summer of 1861.⁷² John Edward Young, the farmer from nearby Athens Township, observed in August, “Business lively and the town full of people and teames.” One month later, he noted “Trade is pretty lively and people are beginning to gain confidence in each other and look to the future with more confidence.”⁷³ Mercy Conkling, one of Mary Lincoln’s oldest friends in Springfield, reported the developments to her son that November: “Strange to say, business in Springfield has wonderfully increased this fall, and you can perceive a marked difference in the numbers you meet on the streets.... we have very much to feel truly grateful to a kind Providence.”⁷⁴ The war did not bring financial relief to all individuals, but it provided hope.

No wonder the community responded to the facility’s sudden closure that winter with surprise and disappointment. In order to centralize wartime operations, the federal government took over the purchasing of munitions and other military goods. Despite protests from Governor Richard Yates and other Illinois leaders who begged that states retain this responsibility, and hoping Lincoln would understand their concerns, the War Department moved forward and took over this responsibility. The factory’s closing dismayed many in the community, especially those

⁷¹ Wilson, *The Business of Civil War*, 13-14.

⁷² *Daily Illinois State Journal*, June 1861.

⁷³ "An Illinois Farmer during the Civil War: Extracts from the Journal of John Edward Young, 1859-66," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 26, no. 1/2 (1933): 93-94.

⁷⁴ Mercy Levering Conkling to Clinton Conkling, November 17, 1861, Conkling Family Collection, ALPLM.

with husbands, fathers, and sons serving in uniform who depended on the factory's wages to sustain their families.⁷⁵

Other local businesses benefited from early wartime mobilization but most saw their profits wane considerably after 1861. The state had few military goods available after Fort Sumter so leaders tasked with equipping troops originally purchased necessities from storeowners in the community. These businesses relished this opportunity, but in truth many had already been trying to cash in on the prospect of war, months before Fort Sumter became the chief headline in newspapers across the country. Some advertised their wide selection of boots and belts, while others simply tried to catch the reader's attention. One storeowner ran the following announcement in a February newspaper advertisement:

“WAR WAR! AND RUMORS OF WAR are of no importance to the citizens of Springfield when the fact becomes known that ARTHUR G. BOWERS, WATCHMAKER AND JEWELER, is now located on Fifth street, four doors north of Melvin's Drug store, where he is determined to war against all over charges in the repairing of WATCHES, CLOCKS, JEWELRY, &c.”⁷⁶

One of the biggest military projects for local businesses was the construction of Camp Butler, discussed earlier. When officials announced the camp's opening date, contracts went out to Springfield merchants for bread, beef, and straw. Local saloons and restaurants could expect rising clientele with these soldiers in the area.

Not all businesses partook in the financial spoils of wartime spending. State officials across the North regularly displayed favoritism to certain providers, including leaders in Springfield. Illinois's Quartermaster General John Wood, one of the city's wealthiest residents, admitted his preference for “personal intercourse with the contractors” in dealing for goods over

⁷⁵ Hubbard, *Illinois's War*, 57.

⁷⁶ *Daily Illinois State Register*, February 23, 1861.

advertising that he described as “too inconvenient and impracticable for adoption.”⁷⁷ Much of this materiel, however, was suspect. Those individuals hoping to make a quick profit off of war contributed to the “shoddy” supplies made available in 1861. Some businesses produced goods very cheaply in order to compete for contract bids, aware that quartermasters were interested in paying less for more equipment. The problem was widespread throughout the Northern states, and newspapers across the country shared the sentiments Springfield’s *Register* expressed in September 1861: “fortunes are made” of the “cheated community of shoddy cloth wearers” who donned uniforms that “after a few days trial of the rotten fabrics, almost naked.”⁷⁸

The experience of Isaac Diller illustrates the experience of one individual’s unsuccessful bid to gain financially from the war despite an existing relationship with President Lincoln. The Springfield businessman, having just returned from serving as consul in Bremen in 1862, proposed a new way of making gunpowder that he had learned while in Germany. Diller argued that this innovation would save the government large sums of money, and he requested \$150,000 to fund the design. Lincoln was willing to give Diller a chance, but the president decided to withhold funding until further testing on the project had been completed. Military officials determined that the powder was unsuitable for military use, thus ending Diller’s attempt to capitalize on a wartime opportunity.⁷⁹

Others had better luck, not the least Springfield’s wealthiest residents. One of the richest men in the city, fifty-three year old merchant banker John Williams, straddled the hazy boundary between the public and private sectors during the war. Along with many of his fellow financial

⁷⁷ Wilson, *The Business of Civil War*, 19.

⁷⁸ *Daily Illinois State Register*, September 4, 1861; Gallman, *The North Fights the Civil War*, 17.

⁷⁹ Isaac R. Diller to Abraham Lincoln, Wednesday, September 10, 1862, Lincoln Collection, LOC. Numerous records relating to this episode can be found in the Lincoln Collection found on the Library of Congress website.

elites, Williams was one of the “patriotic capitalists” Governor Yates commended for contributing funds to “the raising of our State troops and temporarily providing for them.” Returning the favor, Yates appointed Williams as Commissary General of Illinois where he was charged with outfitting and equipping soldiers. Williams was a Republican and strong supporter of Lincoln’s candidacy, using his various political and business contacts while mobilizing Illinois’s troops.⁸⁰ Later during the war, Williams helped organize and was elected president and director of the First National Bank of Springfield that opened in 1864. Some of its first customers were soldiers traveling through the region toward the end of the war, including those awaiting their discharge and eager to invest their wartime cash into a new account.⁸¹

Agriculture witnessed mixed results. Farmers in the Midwest struggled in their ongoing recovery from the Panic of 1857, hurt further from recurring droughts in the region. In late 1861, John Edward Young described the dire situation he and his fellow farmers endured: “This part of our state is beginning to feel the effects of drouth very sensibly. Water is becomeing scarce and wheat and pastures are looking dry and parched. So long and continued a speel of dry warm weather so late in the season is unusual.” Not until 1863 did things turn around with consistent rainfall. In the meantime, production on the farm also retarded after healthy young men enlisted in the army. Demand for foodstuffs increased with the war and put additional pressure on growers, while farmers sometimes found their property – their livelihood – threatened by soldiers stationed close to their crops. One owner claimed that the close proximity of Camp Butler’s barracks forced him to suspend his business on his grove, “one of the finest in the County ... so

⁸⁰ “Proclamation by the Governor,” *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Twenty-Second General Assembly of the State of Illinois, at Their Second Session, Begun and Held at Springfield, April 23, 1861* (Springfield, Illinois: Bailhache & Baker, Printers, 1861), 8; Wilson, *The Business of Civil War*, 11.

⁸¹ Robert E. Coleberd, “John Williams: A Merchant Banker in Springfield, Illinois,” *Agricultural History* 42, no. 3 (July 1968): 264-265.

long as the Troops Remain here owing to the Fences being thrown down Corn plucked from the stalks Hogs & P[ou]ltry killed.”⁸²

Opportunities to profit from the four years of fighting eluded the majority of Springfield’s populace. Additionally, wartime developments – the state arsenal, Camp Yates, Camp Butler, the Soldier’s Home – were created to serve a temporary need and not intended to last longer than was necessary. The war therefore arrested Springfield’s economic growth and development at a time when other Midwest communities thrived and persevered. Chicago, for instance, a growing metropolis already before the war, became the largest manufacturer and supplier outside of the Northeast for Union armies, bypassing Cincinnati and St. Louis in the process. That latter city, while unable to keep pace with Chicago’s growth, still doubled in population even as Missouri remained embroiled in its own civil war. After Chicago, the next two largest Illinois cities, Quincy and Peoria, witnessed continued population growth during this period, both benefitting from major local waterways and a considerably larger influx of permanent newcomers than Springfield. Even Illinois communities smaller than Springfield such as Aurora, Galesburg, Decatur, and Jacksonville, saw their populations grow at a higher proportional rate than the capital city.⁸³

Few discussed it publicly at the time, but private discussions of removing the capital elsewhere took place in and outside of Springfield. Therefore, when the war wound down, local leaders and “boosters” recognized the real possibility that their community might suffer far

⁸² U. Mann to Richard Yates, September 2, 1862, Richard Yates Collection, ALPLM; Phillip Shaw Paludan, *"A People's Contest": The Union & Civil War, 1861-1865* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1996), 156-157, 163; "An Illinois Farmer during the Civil War," 95-96; Hubbard, *Illinois's War*, 153.

⁸³ Census figures acquired from the United State Census Bureau, www.census.gov; Arthur C. Cole, *The Centennial History of Illinois: The Era of the Civil War, 1848-1870*, Three vols., vol. Three (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois Centennial Commission, 1919), 351.

worse consequences based on these trends. The events in the 1865 spring became all that more significant for the city's fate, described in chapter six.

Conclusion

Springfield's Civil War experience was different from the majority of Northern communities, chiefly from the tens of thousands of troops passing through the area who brought their virtues and vices with them. Locals marveled at the presence of enemy prisoners in the first years of war and made adjustments for the arrival of Southern refugees in the latter years. Most of the city's two thousand enlisted males returned home after the war, but not all, leaving a constant reminder of the conflict's toll in postwar years. In other ways, however, the Springfield that Lincoln left in 1861 was little different from the one his slain remains returned to in 1865. There was no sign of "total war" in the city. Springfield's largest industry was tied to agriculture, but persistent droughts during the war years resulted in slower farming production. Other Northern cities that invested in munitions and arms manufacturing attracted prospective employees and continued to see growth after the guns fell silent in 1865. The munitions factory in Springfield, on the other hand, closed after only eight months in 1861 despite bringing promising economic benefits and potential growth to the community regardless of the ownership's questionable hiring practices. Fewer court cases during these years disrupted the practice of law, one of the town's most prevalent professions. Municipal government was forced to redirect funds originally set aside for city development and improvements to war-related projects. In short, the war curbed the "opportunity to grow" Springfield experienced in the 1840s and 1850s, a setback the city could little afford to endure as its future hung in the balance.

CHAPTER THREE
“THE HOME OF LINCOLN CONDEMNS THE PROCLAMATION”:
EMANCIPATION FRACTURES SPRINGFIELD UNITY

Springfield’s wartime unity – brief as it was – eroded shortly after the two armies confronted each other. This chapter argues that emancipation was the explanation for this rift, an issue that polarized Springfielders from the war’s early months, well before Lincoln issued the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation in September 1862. This chapter tracks the city’s divide from the 1861 summer through the 1862 midterm congressional elections, highlighting how emancipation split Republicans in Lincoln’s home and led to the party’s setbacks at the polls that year. The growing political fall-out over this period produced uncertainty, most noticeably the question over the state’s ongoing commitment to the Union, described in chapter four.

Unity Withered: Frémont’s Proclamation, Race, and the 1861 Election

The grand citywide Fourth of July celebration of 1861 demonstrated that a Northern community, even a politically divided one such as Springfield, could lay aside its evident political differences and rally in the face of national tragedy. But as chapter one illustrates, that was no simple feat. Stephen A. Douglas deserves credit for this consensus as his moving speech against treason in the State House brought most Springfield Democrats into the fold, and his words resonated several weeks later after his death, prolonging common ground between the two political factions in Illinois’s capital city. Other than some holdouts, Democrats in town pledged their commitment to war against secession, even with the Republican Lincoln serving as commander-in-chief.

The problem was that Springfield unity was never stable, even in the months following Sumter. In his April 25 address to the packed Legislative Hall, Douglas emphasized the shared

responsibilities of all patriots. “The first duty of an American citizen,” he said, “is obedience to the constitution and laws of the country.” Threats to the nation’s survival were reason enough to bridge the divide between local Republicans and Democrats, Douglas suggested. The two parties mostly agreed with this sentiment, at least initially, but the war brought new challenges and questions over what that country, with its current “constitution and laws,” should look like if its citizens hoped to deter secession from occurring again.¹

Douglas was silent on slavery and emancipation in his explanation of the crisis’ background as well as available options for the Northern states. Only toward the end of his speech did he refer to the Southern states’ “domestic institutions” and “their rights of person or property,” and only then to reiterate his vow not “to take up arms or to sanction war upon” the seceded bloc.² This omission appears deliberate as Douglas rarely shied from offering his thoughts on race or slavery. He was the author of the infamous 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act, a bill that repealed the 1820 Missouri Compromise and opened up the prospect of slavery to the Kansas Territory. The same year he ran against Lincoln for the presidency he rejected Republican statements that blacks should be afforded the same constitutional rights as whites. The Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution were “made by white men, on the white basis, for the benefit of white men and the posterity forever, and should be administered by white men, and by none other whatsoever.”³ Avoiding emancipation in his April 25 address perhaps attracted a good many Springfield and Illinois Democrats to the defense of the Union.

¹ Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 866.

² “Speech of Senator Douglas before the Legislature of Illinois, April 25, 1861,” Stephen A. Douglas Collection, ALPLM.

³ Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 725.

Douglas died six weeks later in his Chicago home on June 3, leaving his followers in Springfield lost and grief-stricken. The next day, the Democratic *Register*'s eulogy praised Douglas's trusted voice and leadership, particularly his "guidance and direction" during the nation's recent turmoil. Democrats in the capital city mourned "the loss of our long tried, dearly loved friend – the friend of our boyhood, our youth, and our manhood – our constant friend."⁴ The town's political unity of late withstood news of Douglas's death, but only temporarily. As the conflict prolonged and evolved into one for reunion *and* emancipation, and as a wedge between the two parties widened after 1861, Douglas's final plea no longer served as a guide for Northern Democrats even though his shadow in Springfield lingered through the war's duration. Instead, with his admired reputation amongst Republicans just before his death, and his enduring reputation as the leader of Illinois's Democracy, the two parties competed over who best knew how the "Little Giant" would react to wartime developments had he remained alive. Stephen A. Douglas's brief tenure as a rallying point for the Springfield populace had ended shortly after his passing. He had returned, in death, to the divisive character he was in life before his April 25 State House address.

Before Douglas transitioned back to a contentious figure, however, signs of community friction began one month after the senator was laid to rest. Newspaper dispatches in July reported on the movements of Northern armies in Virginia and the likelihood a confrontation might occur at any point. The Battle of Bull Run took place July 21, and Springfielders along with the rest of the country eagerly waited to learn how their armies had fared. As reports streamed in with the most recent updates locals soon discovered that the Union side had been defeated and forced to retreat. "[A] repulse was the last thing we were looking for," Springfield's Republican *Journal*

⁴ *Daily Illinois State Register*, June 4, 1861.

noted based upon the coverage it had received and reprinted in the days leading up to the encounter. The editor mentioned that its offices and hallways were crowded throughout the night “with men who could not sleep till they knew the worst.” Supporters of the Lincoln administration bemoaned the defeat, but believed this setback would only embolden their armies. Once facts of the clash filtered out the rumors, the *Journal* reassured its readers that “the hosts of the North will now pour down upon the alleys of Virginia in such numbers and with a determination that will brook no resistance.”⁵

Not everyone shared such optimism. The rival *Register* plainly pinned “Blame for Manassas” on factions within the Republican Party, demonstrating:

... that the errors which have been committed are mainly attributable to the strife and jealousy of conflicting cliques of the dominant party — that instead of uniting for the common patriotic purpose of quelling rebellion and maintaining the integrity of the country, these politicians are struggling with each other for ascendancy in the government councils whereon to base advantage for future partisan purposes.⁶

A growing portion of the local population held the current Republican leadership responsible for creating a false illusion that war with the seceded states would be quick and easy.

Somewhat surprising, this cynicism extended beyond the Democratic Party. In early fall Republican Illinois Senator Orville H. Browning observed some of his constituents losing faith with the administration and its handling of national affairs. Browning travelled through his state in September 1861 and found things “in rather a deplorable condition.” He begged Lincoln to make changes or risk losing Illinois’s support. “The events in the West, of the past few weeks, have not only disheartened the people, but gone far to demoralize them.” Browning was referring to the military situation as well as mismanagement from military and political leaders. Up and down Illinois he found troops poorly armed, improperly clothed, and “no more fit for service

⁵ Quinn, "Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War," 19-20.

⁶ *Daily Illinois State Register*, July 30, 1861.

now than they were the day they enlisted,” including “broken Regiments at Springfield,” adding to the increased agitation over the unruly soldier presence in town that summer discussed in chapter two. “[I]t is now a hundred times more difficult to arouse any true feeling of patriotism than it was a month ago,” he asserted, “and enthusiasm is dead.”⁷

What particularly unsettled the Springfield community, however, was the military situation unfolding in neighboring Missouri. The Union general in charge of operations in that state, John C. Frémont, the Republican Party’s presidential nominee in 1856, made news in August less than three weeks after taking command following General Nathaniel Lyon’s death at the Battle of Wilson’s Creek. He issued a proclamation wherein all rebel property in the state was subject to confiscation, including slaves. Before Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation into law in 1863, Union generals often justified the seizure of goods that aided the Confederate war effort, extending to enslaved African Americans. The passage of two confiscation acts before the Emancipation Proclamation legitimized this practice, even though it still considered Southern black men and women property. But since Frémont was the first to employ this tactic he also received the most attention from it, both positive and negative. This was the first evident connection between slavery and the war for many in the North, including those in Springfield following events along Illinois’s western border.⁸

Besides exposing this revelation, Frémont’s proclamation (and command) would erode whatever lingering unity still existed between Springfield Republicans and Democrats, barely four months removed from Stephen A. Douglas’s rousing speech in the State House. Historian Adam I. P. Smith dates the return of Northern partisanship to the Emancipation Proclamation,

⁷ Orville H. Browning to Abraham Lincoln, September 24, 1861, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

⁸ Frémont’s order also announced the death penalty for guerrillas found fighting against Union soldiers. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 352.

but in Springfield political allegiances had barely waned owing to events in neighboring Missouri in 1861.⁹

Springfield Republican reaction to Frémont's measure was mixed, but it was Lincoln's response that stirred local party members and supporters. On September 11, the president forced Frémont to rescind the proclamation that included a section on executing guerillas captured by Union soldiers. Lincoln hoped to avoid public debate on emancipation so as to prevent additional states, especially the Border States, from seceding. Despite his best efforts, however, the subject lingered in communities across the country, including his hometown. The abolitionist Erastus Wright, a land agent in town with deep religious objections to slavery, applauded the general's order. "The Laws of War Justified it," Wright wrote to the president, "and the necessities of the case required it." Wright was obviously discouraged when he learned that Lincoln had overruled Frémont. If anyone "expects to Put down rebellion and at the same time protect Slavery he may find it an uphill business-- Has not God a controversy now with this Nation."¹⁰ It was therefore Lincoln's action (and not Frémont's controversial order) that exposed a rift within the local Republican Party. As early as autumn 1861, an internal argument surfaced over whether emancipation should be added to the Union's wartime mission. This debate dogged local Republicans for the next two years, particularly when dreadful news from the military frontlines seemed to justify critics' claims that the additional task of ending slavery hampered the combat effort.

The radical, or abolitionist, wing of the party – far more vocal in its denunciations over Lincoln's handling than moderates troubled by Frémont's proclamation – had little interest in a war that excluded emancipation as a wartime goal. They howled at Lincoln after he threatened to

⁹ Smith, *No Party Now*, 51.

¹⁰ Erastus Wright to Abraham Lincoln, September 20, 1861, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

remove the general from command after refusing to follow a presidential directive. Wright predicted that Frémont's removal would have "a very paralyzing effect in all the Western Army[.] Our soldiers 50 thousand in Illinois turned out to crush Rebellion, not protect it." William Herndon was equally dumbfounded after his former law partner revoked Frémont's decree. Northerners must eventually address the "Negro question," Herndon declared, and why not now? Did the government assume it could "squench out this huge rebellion by pop guns filled with rose water," he wondered? James Conkling expressed dismay in his friend Lincoln's "complete non-committal policy," and predicted that if Frémont was removed "the administration will meet with a perfect storm of indignation from the West." "The hearts of the soldiers and the people are with Fremont," Richard Yates surveyed from his perch in the Governor's Mansion, especially since the general demonstrated aggressiveness against the enemy otherwise not yet witnessed by other Northern commanders.¹¹ Historian Arthur C. Cole summed up the abolitionist position in 1861 as such: "To the radical, the administration seemed to be neglecting the very means best calculated to hasten the suppression of the rebellion; it appeared that there was danger of 'being sold out to the Slave Power.'"¹²

Moderate Republicans split on the prospect of Frémont's dismissal. Mercy Conkling did not share her husband's attitudes on abolition, but she did agree with him that the newspapers had sullied the general's reputation despite his popular following in Illinois's capital city. Besides a "few exceptions," she recalled from a recent visit to Camp Butler, the men there "all expressed great anxiety to have Fremont retain his command." Even Frémont's detractors in

¹¹ Wright to Lincoln, September 20, 1861, Lincoln Collection, LOC; James C. Conkling to Clinton Conkling, November 1, 1861, Conkling Family Collection, ALPLM; Richard Yates to "Governor," September 23, 1861, Yates Collection, ALPLM; Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon*, 150.

¹² Arthur C. Cole, "President Lincoln and the Illinois Radical Republicans," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 4, no. 4 (March 1918): 424.

town, such as former Illinois Lieutenant Governor and German-American Gustave Koerner, questioned the general's release. "I have not become an admirer of Fremont as yet," Koerner confirmed in a private note to Lincoln, "... but it seems to me, that to remove him just now would be a suicidal policy." Koerner was reluctant to admit this, and did so only with "a desire to see us & the Country prosper." The Springfield *Journal* never fully committed to Frémont's proclamation, displaying its habit of serving as Lincoln's mouthpiece. Nor, however, did the Republican organ call for the general's firing until it had become impossible for Frémont to "devote his full energies to the prosecution of the war." When Lincoln eventually removed Frémont in November, the editor presumed "Every one, whether friend or enemy of Gen. Fremont, will rejoice that this vexed question is at length settled, no matter in what manner."¹³

The only Republican to speak publicly against Frémont was John G. Nicolay, President Lincoln's personal secretary. Nicolay was in Springfield that fall and provided his boss with an assessment of attitudes in the West. When Nicolay wrote to Lincoln in late-October, nearly two months after Frémont issued his infamous order in Missouri, the list of offenses against the general had expanded. Along with the controversial proclamation were charges of incompetency, multiple reports of sparring with his military staff, and an unwillingness to work with Missouri's political leadership. These spiraled into allegations of widespread fraud and corruption occurring under his command, virtually silencing any rhetoric related to the emancipation edict. With Frémont's early supporters having gone silent in the aftermath of these charges, Nicolay concluded in his note to Lincoln "that any change will be for the better." "So far as Illinois is concerned," Nicolay continued, "there will not be the least risk or danger in his unconditional

¹³ Mercy Conkling to Clinton Conkling, October 27, 1861, Conkling Family Collection, ALPLM; Gustave Koerner to Abraham Lincoln, October 8, 1861, Lincoln Collection, LOC; *Daily Illinois State Journal*, November 7, 1861; *Daily Illinois State Register*, October 25, 1861.

removal at this time.” Two questions left unresolved are whether Lincoln’s own thoughts influenced Nicolay’s judgment and, based on the above reactions, which individuals Nicolay confronted in determining local public opinion. Regardless, he was more blunt in a private letter to his fellow secretary John Hay, alleging that Frémont was “played out,” and that the “d---d fool has completely frittered away the finest opportunity a man of small eminence ever had to make his name immortal.” By the time Lincoln eventually relieved Frémont of command on November 2, most of the general’s initial supporters had lost confidence in him as the mounting list of scandals outweighed debate over his proclamation. The president was fortunate that the issue had diminished temporarily, but the arguments over emancipation never went away entirely – in fact, they would reemerge with greater intensity in coming years.¹⁴

Remarkably, while Frémont’s emancipation edict sparked vocal debate within the Republican camp, few Springfield Democrats spoke publicly against it, at least initially. Supporters of the administration failed to miss that detail. “Some of the intensely Democratic journals are silent about it – for instance some near home,” *The Quincy Daily Whig and Republican* observed, “but none dare condemn it.”¹⁵ This silence, however, was not a sign of ambivalence amongst the Democracy. To the contrary, Springfield Democrats began to unify for the first time since the secession crisis, even though this unity originally had little to do with emancipation.

They rallied amid the escalating charges of abuse and ineptness occurring under Frémont’s command. “It is somewhat remarkable that the administration has so long submitted to the insubordination of this upstart general,” the *Register* wrote in late October. The people had

¹⁴ John G. Nicolay to Abraham Lincoln, October 21, 1861, Lincoln Collection, LOC; Donald, *Lincoln*, 315-316; Helen Nicolay, *Lincoln’s Secretary: A Biography of John G. Nicolay* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1949), 124.

¹⁵ *The Quincy Daily Whig and Republican*, September 5, 1861.

lost faith in the “military dictator of Missouri,” its editor continued, and the string of setbacks occurring in Missouri “was owing to incompetency or inefficiency in the chief of the department.”¹⁶ Combined with scarce positive news from Northern fighting and growing impatience along the home front, these reports from Missouri steadily galvanized Springfield Democrats against the war’s current direction, to the point that they felt increasingly comfortable denouncing Republicans that earlier would have opened them up to charges of disloyalty.

Democratic presses in Illinois soon after turned their attention inward and placed blame for the poor state of affairs – the same ones that Senator Browning alluded to earlier – on Republican leadership, particularly those in charge of the Prairie State’s political and military machinations. “The negligent, weak and inefficient management of our state affairs is a subject of much complaint,” the *Rock Island Argus* railed in early September. Illinoisans would be proud of their state’s patriotism and contributions to the war thus far, the editor went on, “but for the imbecility which reigns in Springfield.”¹⁷ Locally and nationally, Democrats claimed, Republican leaders had demonstrated their incapability of preserving the Union; at the very least, they struggled keeping disorderly military commanders under control.

Conveniently, Democratic unity and attacks against the party’s opponents coincided with that year’s looming fall election. Though little of their initial public criticism related to the issue of emancipation, Democratic opposition to it intensified while the Frémont imbroglio carried into October and November, and from there it was a short walk to embrace outright rejection of slavery’s abolition. Attacks against the handling of the war found shared time alongside condemnations on emancipation as a war aim in the columns of the *Register*. And this was not a

¹⁶ *Daily Illinois State Register*, October 24, 25, 1861.

¹⁷ *Rock Island Argus*, September 5, 1861.

risky position considering the prejudiced attitudes of Springfield's white citizens on race and slavery.

When Mary Hill Miner was a child growing up in town during the 1850s and 1860s, she remembered “the great topic of the day was Slavery and Anti-Slavery, and as the years went on the feeling became very bitter.”¹⁸ The majority of central Illinois inhabitants rejected the pro-abolitionist sympathies found in the northern part of the state. They also spurned the proslavery attitudes common in southern Illinois. Like Lincoln when he lived there, Springfielders fell somewhere between the two ideologies when it came to views on slaves and the institution of slavery. With the state's notorious “Black Laws” passed in 1853 prohibiting African American immigration into the Prairie State and placing restrictions on those already living within its borders, white settlers interested in moving to central Illinois did so with assurances that they could live undisturbed from the presence of blacks, free or enslaved. That helps clarify why some parts of the state and the region, including Springfield, attracted white settlers hailing from both Northern and Southern states: they found solace in a frontier without slavery.¹⁹ This also explains why so few African Americans lived in the city. The 1860 census reported 203 African Americans living in Springfield, representing 2.2 percent of the town's population. This was a slight increase from the 171 blacks reported in 1850, but that figure represented 3.9 percent of

¹⁸ Mary Miner Hill Recollections, March 21, 1923, Mary Miner Hill Collection, ALPLM.

¹⁹ Despite these laws, slavery actually existed in Springfield for a period, though it was generally kept quiet. Some of the earliest settlers to the area brought slaves with them. Lincoln knew some of the town's “slaveholders,” including his in-laws Ninian and Benjamin Edwards. Few slaves actually resided in Springfield, however, and the practice slowly dissolved over time. Winkle, *The Young Eagle*, 252-253, 257; Roger D. Bridges, “Equality Deferred: Civil Rights for Illinois Blacks, 1865-1885,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 74, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 83. For an in-depth study on Western attitudes against slavery, see Eugene H. Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), especially chapter 2.

the city's population. Springfield's African American population increased at higher rates after 1865, a trend witnessed throughout Illinois during the postwar period.²⁰

Despite the relatively small black presence in town, controversy over race and slavery remained contested ones in town. Neither political party held a monopoly on racism in Lincoln's hometown, even though they differed over the fate of slavery in the country. Democratic attitudes toward blacks mirrored those of the national party, including those fostered by Stephen A. Douglas. Republicans in Springfield, comprised of former Whigs from the North and the South, also held intolerant views of African Americans. In 1850, the Whig *Sangamo Journal* once wrote, "Whatever may be said to the contrary, in the Free States, as in the Slave States, it is our opinion that the black man will never be the equal of the white man." One decade later, after the dissolution of the Whig party forced the newspaper to update its masthead to the *Illinois State Journal*, little else had changed in terms of its racial attitudes during that period. In response to Lincoln's first message to Congress in July 1861, the president's hometown mouthpiece was glad to "find 'no 'niggerism' in it" – that is, no mention of adding slavery to the war's overall aim.²¹

Colonization was a popular option amongst Springfield residents, regardless of party affiliation, for ushering out slavery. Most supported efforts to transfer blacks abroad but for dissimilar reasons. Some simply disliked living alongside African-Americans. Others believed blacks could not live equally with whites, that the two groups would never find common ground and would both suffer as a result, a position that Lincoln shared when he lived there.

²⁰ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census, Population, 1910* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913), 2:504; McLain, "A Study of the Population of Illinois from 1860-1870," 62-64.

²¹ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, July 9, 1861, in Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life*, vol. 2, 172; Winkle, *The Young Eagle*, 253.

Colonization was a popular concept in Springfield during the two decades preceding the war, the first local chapter officially opening in 1839. Democrats, Whigs, and eventually Republicans participated in chapters often held in local churches.²² Lincoln declared his support of colonization during the Kansas crisis along with his renewed interest in politics. He once served as an officer of the Illinois State Colonization Society and continued to regard colonization as an option during the war when he informed a group of blacks visiting the White House in August 1862 – just before issuing the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation – that the differences between whites and blacks was a “great disadvantage to us both, as I think, your race suffer very greatly, many of them, by living among us, while ours suffers from your presence.”²³

What ultimately concerned Springfield’s white population, however, was not the demise of the institution of slavery. They instead worried what affect the emancipation of nearly four million enslaved African Americans might have on their community. This was a feeling shared across the Northern states. Early in the war, Illinois Senator Lyman Trumbull summed up the attitudes of his constituents, saying “there is a very great aversion in the West—I know it is so in my State—against having free Negroes come among us. Our people want nothing to do with the Negro.”²⁴

Just ahead of the 1861 November elections, with the ongoing Frémont saga still hovering in the background, Springfield’s Democratic organ the *Illinois State Register* appealed to the community’s racist anxieties and stoked fears of former slaves emigrating from the South and taking up permanent residency in the North. Editor Charles Lanphier claimed that thousands of

²² Winkle, *The Young Eagle*, 255.

²³ Richard E. Hart, "Springfield's African Americans as a Part of the Lincoln Community," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 20(Winter 1999); Phillip Shaw Paludan, "Lincoln and Colonization: Policy or Propoganda?," *ibid.* 25, no. 1 (2004): 32-35; Smith, *No Party Now*, 56.

²⁴ Smith, *No Party Now*, 54-55.

blacks could be “at our doors before the lease of another twelve-month.” To avoid such an alarming prospect, Lanphier determined it best that “there be no general emancipation.” Pushing further against claims that freed slaves and whites could live together peacefully, he argued that any effort to pursue this endeavor would compel secessionist sympathizers in the Border States into the arms of the Confederacy, a prospect equally concerning to Lincoln at the time. Every Southerner, the editorial warned, “would fly to arms to protect themselves against the scenes of carnage, rapine and unbridled passion which would follow the liberation of 4,000,000 slaves.”²⁵ “Black Republicans,” as Lanphier customarily described the opposition, had made their intentions clear that they preferred to end slavery even if it meant the country’s dissolution.

In this sense the *Register* spoke overwhelmingly on behalf of Democrats in town, and even for some Republicans. This was the first moment since the secession crisis that the Democracy in Springfield displayed any true signs of unity, bringing cohesion and purpose to a party that struggled to find traction in the aftermath of its Southern wing departing to form a new country. This revitalized Democratic antagonism and partisanship, resurfacing during a political season no less, expunged whatever harmony existed between the two parties in town, specifically since Democrats rejected emancipation as an added wartime strategy.

What had happened? Six months earlier, just two weeks after the federal surrender of Fort Sumter, Stephen A. Douglas appealed to a packed State House for a suspension of partisanship with the country’s fate at risk:

... [I]n my opinion it is your duty to lay aside, for the time being, your party creeds and party platforms; to dispense with your party organizations and partisan appeals; to forget that you were ever divided, until you have rescued the government and the country from their assailants. When this paramount duty shall have been performed, it will be proper for each of us to resume our respective political positions, according to our convictions of

²⁵ *Daily Illinois State Register*, October 19, November 2, 23, December 28, 1861.

public duty. [Applause.] Give me a country first, that my children may live in peace; then we will have a theatre for our party organizations to operate upon.²⁶

By November 1861, however, a disagreement over how to interpret the Little Giant's words developed between the two parties, a dispute that carried on in the columns of the city's rival newspapers throughout the war. Republicans took Douglas's statement to mean that all citizens should, without criticism, accept the strategies that the government (under Republican control) implemented in its efforts to subdue the rebellion. Democrats, on the other hand, understood Douglas's point to mean that partisanship should be set aside until the lone objective of restoring the Union, by constitutional means, was accomplished. Nothing in his speech gave Democrats the impression that Republicans had authority to expand the war's scope and dictate strategy however they pleased.

Only in passing did Douglas promise to “never sanction nor acquiesce in any warfare whatever upon the constitutional rights or domestic institutions of the people of the Southern States,” a subtle yet unmistakable detail illustrating his unwillingness to meddle with the region's system of slavery. The Illinois senator primarily urged the crowd to stand together against the “widespread conspiracy” attempting to “destroy the best government the sun of heaven ever shed its rays upon.”²⁷ Everything else was secondary. And because Douglas refrained from lecturing on slavery – likely as a way to prevent Southern Illinois from breaking off and joining the Confederacy, as some have argued – the statesman successfully persuaded a majority of Democrats in Springfield (with backing from the *Register*) to heed his call.

²⁶ “Speech of Senator Douglas before the Legislature of Illinois, April 25, 1861,” Stephen A. Douglas Collection, ALPLM.

²⁷ “Speech of Senator Douglas before the Legislature of Illinois, April 25, 1861,” Stephen A. Douglas Collection, ALPLM.

Despite his influence, however, a small segment of city Democrats questioned laying aside “party creeds and party platforms,” depicted by party leader Virgil Hickox’s hesitation discussed in chapter one. They had grown suspicious following “the great love that the Republicans profess now to have for him.”²⁸ This initial skepticism strengthened over the course of the 1861 summer and emerged as full-scale opposition to Republican leadership when the November elections rolled around.

An atypical voting season to be certain, the election that year would select members for a new state constitutional convention. Due to Illinois’s sudden population spike, the 1859 state legislature charged the next governing body with updating the state’s constitution most recently passed in 1848. Issues demanding reform included a reapportionment of voting districts and addressing the state’s financial obligations to its banks and railroads, to name just a couple. Yet the Republican majority resolved to postpone this task until the following year with the secession crisis hanging over the 1861 legislative session, hopeful that national matters had subsided by then.

The situation had instead deteriorated from secession to war, and the two parties approached the November 1861 election quite differently. Nationally, Republican leadership encouraged an antipartisanship approach to political matters, similar to Stephen A. Douglas’s proposal after the fall of Fort Sumter. The Republican *State Journal* pushed this thinking before the election and for the remainder of the war. “If we understand the matter rightly, there are no parties,” the editor wrote in early August 1861. “We are all for the Union, for the preservation of the government and for the speedy suppression of the rebellion.” Then again, still reeling from setbacks on the battlefield and the party’s schism over the prospect of emancipation as a war

²⁸ Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 869.

aim, local Republicans exhibited little enthusiasm before voting day. The farmer John Edward Young depicted apathy amongst his Republican kin. “There is but very little interest manifested in this election. Our people have something else to think about than partisan politics.” Young preferred races where “party lines are discarded and good men of all parties unite in support of men for office of true patriotism and fidelity irrespective of former party predilections.”²⁹

“People’s Union” or “People’s Party” tickets materialized in states such as Ohio, New York, and, to a lesser degree, Pennsylvania for the fall 1861 elections, but there was little enthusiasm from Illinois Democrats to follow suit and campaign alongside Republican candidates in the state. They questioned this strategy in the difficult months since Fort Sumter and especially in the wake of the Frémont debacle. On the day of the election, the editor of the Democratic *Chicago Times* brushed aside appeals to put aside political differences: “*Henceforth the two parties must be as distinct as oil and water*—as far apart as earth and sun.”³⁰ Two weeks before the election, Springfield’s anti-administration organ pushed back against the rival *Journal*’s plea to dissolve political markers and have candidates run as members of a “Union Party” to demonstrate the state’s commitment to the war. The *Register* blasted “no-party” sentiment if it meant “that we are all to become abolitionists.”³¹

In 1861, Illinois Democrats had already tied a poorly waged Republican war with opposition to abolition, and this was the party’s platform for the election. In fact, this would be the Democratic platform for the remainder of the war, and its successes hinged on the

²⁹ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, August 2, 1861, found in Cole, *The Era of the Civil War*, 266. “An Illinois Farmer during the Civil War,” 95. This antipartisan theme is discussed in detail in Adam I. P. Smith’s, *No Party Now: Politics in the Civil War North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

³⁰ Sean Nalty, “‘Come Weal, Come Woe, I Am with the Anti-Slavery Party’: Federalism and the Formation of the Pennsylvania Union Party, 1860-1864,” in Gallagher and Shelden, *A Political Nation: New Directions in Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Political History*, 146-147; Hubbard, *Illinois’s War*, 60.

³¹ *Daily Illinois State Register*, October 19, 1861.

accomplishments and setbacks of the Union armies. This strategy worked in 1861 (and again in 1862) because opposition to emancipation united Democrats while dividing their opponents.³² Unlike their Republican or “Union” opponents, Democrats ably rallied their base ahead of voting day and campaigned fiercely for the party’s candidates. Before casting his vote, the Republican Young scolded Democratic “demagogues [who] are trying to keep up party distinctions and prejudices” and “who would rather see this great nation rent and torn asunder by internal domestic traitors than to abate one iota of their former party prejudices and bitterness.”³³

Democratic candidates handily won a majority of convention seats across the state, better than two to one over their rivals. Low Republican turnout led to the party’s rout throughout Illinois, and in Springfield the Democratic *Register* described Election Day as “an unusually quiet one,” with fewer votes cast than the spring’s township election. Locally the Democratic candidate Benjamin S. Edwards received 1,012 votes to the Republican Shelby M. Cullum’s 765. The 247-vote difference was one of the more lopsided outcomes during the war for the Springfield community outside of the 1862 midterm election, and Democrats interpreted this wide discrepancy as a mandate. “If anything has been revealed by the election,” the *Register* concluded, “it is the fact that people are beginning to discover that the Democratic Party is the true Union party.”³⁴

Republicans were no closer to resolving their party’s rupture after the election results than before. According to the *Journal* – still a moderate Republican mouthpiece for Lincoln –

³² This approach was less reliable during the war’s latter years. Beginning in 1863, Republicans increasingly appreciated how much the Emancipation Proclamation exploited the Confederacy’s military dependence upon slave labor and how easier it allowed Illinois soldiers to perform their duties. I explain this process in chapter five.

³³ “An Illinois Farmer during the Civil War,” 95.

³⁴ *Daily Illinois State Register*, November 15, 1861, found in Cole, *The Era of the Civil War*, 267. Five days later, the *Register* added: “The ‘no party’ dodge on the part of the republican managers was unsuccessful. The democrats would not bite at it, and because they would not, but maintained their integrity as citizens and as democrats, they are charged with ‘bad faith.’” *Daily Illinois State Register*, November 20, 1861.

Democratic candidates won by “turn[ing] the war into an abolition crusade.” Even though emancipation divided Republicans, editor Edward Baker continued, newspapers such as the *Register* rendered their opponents in favor of “arming of the slaves for the purpose of indiscriminate slaughter of men, women and children at the South,” thereby stirring the emotions of voters as they considered their ballot options. Realizing how effective this tactic had been for Democratic leaders, after the election the *Journal* minimized discussion for abolition and instead stressed Lincoln’s handling of the war as “calm in tone” and “conservative in sentiment.”³⁵

Radicals in town on the other hand were still upset that the administration refused to contend with slavery, adamant that destroying the Southern institution lay at the root of Northern military victory. Lincoln’s friend James C. Conkling informed Lyman Trumbull of his disappointment, as “was the country generally upon the complete non-committal policy of the President as indicated in his [December] Message,” absent of “that high toned sentiment which ought to have pervaded a Message at such a critical period as this. Instead of ignoring the subject [of emancipation] and falling far below public opinion and expectation,” Conkling believed, “it should have recommended a bold and decisive policy and should have elevated public sentiment and aroused the national enthusiasm.” Another friend in Springfield, Pascal P. Enos, also wrote Trumbull that “[t]he people are heartily sick of reviews at an expense of one and a quarter millions a day.” If implementing an emancipation policy could benefit the Union armies in the field, “let it be done at once.” If not, “we want to know it now and save ourselves from bankruptcy.”³⁶ This schism haunted local Republicans until the party overwhelmingly accepted

³⁵ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, December 14, 28, 1861.

³⁶ James C. Conkling to Lyman Trumbull, December 16, 1861; P. P. Enos to Lyman Trumbull, January 2, 1862, found in Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life*, 215-216, 234.

emancipation. Until then, Lincoln remained a divisive figure among party members and friends in his hometown.

The Complicated Process of Creating a State Constitution During War

Republicans in Springfield fretted over the incoming Democratic majority's intentions ahead of the convention's opening. The singular mission of drafting a constitution provided little comfort that Democratic leaders would abide by its limited role; Governor Yates and fellow Republicans frequently expected the convention to assume more powers than it had, similar to a legislative body. Beyond that Republicans questioned the convention's loyalty and worried members might obstruct the state's wartime contributions, possibly attempting to pull Illinois troops from the field. These fears emerged days after the election and coincided with reports that members of the Knights of the Golden Circle, a notorious antiwar secret society, had been spotted in the region and drilling in preparation of an attempted overthrow of the Capitol and orchestrating the state's subsequent secession. Authentic or not, Republican newspapers in Illinois rarely shied away from publishing similar accounts since this tactic encouraged a link between the convention and the treasonous K.G.C. On December 7, 1861, the *Journal* warned residents of a K.G.C. lodge in Springfield "numbering a hundred or more," and accounts of this sort persisted well after the constitutional convention convened in January 1862.³⁷ The Springfield correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune* sparked an investigation after asserting "that there were many Knights of the Golden Circle and members of mutual protection societies in the

³⁷ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, December 7, 1861.

convention.” In fact, he continued, “The number of K.G.C.’s has been placed so high, as to come within a few votes of a majority of the convention.”³⁸

Republicans, for all the rumors they spread, had some cause for concern. Democrats held a clear majority, controlling forty-five of the seventy-five convention seats, and no Democrat hailed from a region north of Springfield; in other words, Democrats from central and southern Illinois composed the majority, hardly calming Republican anxieties over the body’s perceived loyalties.³⁹ On the other hand, Republicans were partly to blame for creating this atmosphere. Democrats no doubt entered the convention with a grudge, all having been painted as disloyal traitors before taking their seats. Likewise, Democrats did little to shed their antiwar image as they criticized the conflict’s handling and direction from the convention’s beginning.

As Republicans feared, Democratic leaders treated the convention as a pseudo-governing power with equal (if not more) powers as the governor. Democratic candidates campaigned on tightening regulations for banks and railroads, yet once the convention opened in January 1862 they expanded their sights. Leaders used the body to counteract what they characterized as Governor Yates’s overreach and abuse in his management of the war. They accused the governor of corruption for handing out regimental commissions to his friends and argued that the soldiers should elect their own officers. They also demanded receipts and payroll logs related to the state’s military activities, convinced that unnecessary wartime spending was to blame for the state’s soaring debt. Beyond that, the Democratic agenda involved producing a constitution that would reward the party over the next decade. They pushed for a draft that included a reapportioned map favoring Democratic candidates, a ban on the establishment of new banks,

³⁸ *Chicago Tribune*, February 11, 1862, in Frank L. Klement, "Copperhead Secret Societies: In Illinois during the Civil War," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 48, no. 2 (1955): 154-155.

³⁹ Cole, *The Era of the Civil War*, 267-268.

and a provision outlawing the federal government from interfering with the domestic institution of any state, an obvious reference to slavery. Looking ahead to the 1862 elections, Democratic leaders also sought to cut the governor's four-year term in half, convinced the party could win the seat back from Republican control.⁴⁰

The prospects looked dire to Republicans in Springfield, including friends of Lincoln's, who worried about the convention's ulterior motives. Worse, many believed that Lincoln failed to appreciate the threat that the opposition posed, thus forcing them to look elsewhere for assistance. The most vocal of the bunch was Governor Yates. From the beginning, Yates believed the "usurping convention" was a "deliberate conspiracy to overwhelm and destroy me," and he was not entirely inaccurate. Indeed, convention leaders intended to thwart the governor's influence in every way possible, especially in war-related matters. Yates likened this aim as sympathy with the Southern cause. In early February, he alerted Illinois Senator Orville H. Browning, "The State is evidently on the brink of civil war—the secessionists think doubtless that civil war here would weaken the union cause more than anything else—The strong men in the convention are secessionists at heart[.]" Six days later, he informed Illinois's other Senator Lyman Trumbull, "Secession is deeper and stronger here than you have any idea. Its advocates are numerous and powerful, and respectable." At one point he considered marching "a Regiment into their Hall and [placing] them in custody." While Yates's attempts to associate the

⁴⁰ Bruce Tap, "Race, Rhetoric, and Emancipation: The Election of 1862 in Illinois," *Civil War History* 39, no. 2 (June 1993): 104; Jack Nortrup, "Yates, the Prorogued Legislature, and the Constitutional Convention," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 62, no. 1 (1969): 9; Hubbard, *Illinois's War*, 60; Jennifer L. Weber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 48-49. The one area where the two parties found agreement was a measure excluding black migration and voting in the state, discussed below.

Democratic convention with the rebellion were exaggerated, his fear that the convention attempted to strip his powers were certainly justified.⁴¹

Not nearly as apocalyptic in their rhetoric, the president's closer Springfield allies however shared Yates's concern that Lincoln underestimated the challenges posed by the Democratic convention. State Treasurer William Butler believed "our danger in the State is greater today than since the Rebellion Commenced," but most troubling was the fact that "The President dont seem to understand how and by whome we are Surrounded. I fear will not till it is two late." Butler was convinced "from their Caucus meetings that a large portion of [Democratic convention members] would Vote a direct Vote to Sever the State from the Union," stymied only by the presence of "troops stationed so near them." "I begin to feel as though we were standing on a volcano," Butler expressed in a letter to Senator Browning, and asked "before it is too late to prepare for other and grater evils that from the signs I fear awates us"⁴² Illinois State Auditor Jesse K. Dubois concurred with Butler's assessments, adding, "We are in great peril and God knows what a day may bring forth[.] It is astonishing how bold Treason is" amongst convention members. "Let the President and you ... look well to their own State."⁴³

At the same time, nearly 300 miles southeast of the State House, Northern soldiers began changing the dynamics of the Illinois State Constitutional Convention, as well as attitudes across

⁴¹ Richard Yates to Henderson, February 4, 1862; Yates to Rupel Ward, March 24, 1862, Yates Collection, ALPLM; Richard Yates to Orville H. Browning, February 8, 1862, Orville H. Browning Collection, ALPLM; Richard Yates to Lyman Trumbull, February 14, 1862, found in Cole, *The Era of the Civil War*, 267; Hubbard, *Illinois's War*, 60.

⁴² William Butler to Lyman Trumbull, February 4, 1862, Lyman Trumbull Collection; Butler to Orville H. Browning, February 8, 1862, Orville H. Browning Collection, ALPLM. Butler also feared that a "Civil War in our Midst" would "draw our troops from the Borders of Kentucky and Tennessee," thus exposing Union troops along the Southern frontlines if these men returned home in order to police Illinois.

⁴³ Jesse K. Dubois to Orville H. Browning, February 8, 1862, Orville H. Browning Collection, ALPLM. Two days later, Dubois was quick to congratulate the president on Union military victories in Kentucky. "You are acting Nobly now," he wrote, adding that all of Lincoln's friends in Springfield "feel Proudly and kindly" of his "brave work." See Jesse K. Dubois to Abraham Lincoln, February 10, 1862, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

the national landscape. The tense and heated debates occurring inside the Illinois Capitol gave way to coverage from the Southern battlefields. Union troops fighting in Tennessee reversed a string of military setbacks endured up to that point in the conflict and brought renewed enthusiasm to the Northern home front. First came reports of a military victory at Fort Henry on February 6. Congratulations were “passed from hand to hand” on the streets of Springfield after news that Union troops under Generals Ulysses S. Grant and Springfield’s John A. McClernand captured this Confederate stronghold.⁴⁴ Ten days later, upon learning that Illinois troops assisted in the seizure of Fort Donelson, the farmer John Edward Young could hear Springfielders from his house in the country “wild with enthusiasm and so jubilant that they procured a battery of ten guns from the arsenal and fired the grandest salute every fired in the state. The cannonading lasted nearly an hour.” Similar accounts occurred in the city following the Northern triumph at the Battle of Pea Ridge in Arkansas in early March.⁴⁵ “The West is bound to win all the glory of this war,” Springfield’s Milton Hay concluded after further military victories piled up.⁴⁶ This fortunate Northern shift likewise impelled the Democratically-controlled Constitutional Convention to pause and honor the Illinois men who participated in these battles, giving “cheer after cheer for the Union” and applauding victory “over the rebels and traitors.”⁴⁷ Public interest in these military developments made it plainly obvious that the war commanded everyone’s attention; everything else was secondary, including the machinations of creating a new state constitution.

⁴⁴ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, February 15, 1862, found in V. Hicken, *Illinois in the Civil War* (University of Illinois Press, 1991), 30.

⁴⁵ "An Illinois Farmer during the Civil War," 97.

⁴⁶ Milton Hay to Mary Hay, April 9, 1862, Stuart-Hay Collection, ALPLM.

⁴⁷ Nortrup, "Yates, the Prorogued Legislature, and the Constitutional Convention," 8.

Attention also shifted to the casualty lists following these bouts. A community failed to appreciate the suffering caused by war until the names of fallen and injured soldiers had been revealed to loved ones back home. As described in chapter two, the Springfield populace had yet to understand the full impact of war until these early months of 1862 when multiple families learned that husbands, fathers, and sons had given the ultimate sacrifice to their country. “[W]e can now realize that we are in the midst of War, as it seems to have been brought near our own homes,” Mercy Conkling wrote in February.⁴⁸ Two months later, she wrote that many in town felt moved to visit the injured and suffering following the Battle of Shiloh. “Some of the neighbors have started to the scene of the recent battle to help care for the sick and wounded.”⁴⁹ Leading this recovery effort was Governor Richard Yates, earning him the nickname “the Soldiers’ Friend” while reasserting his authority after the Democratic wing of the Constitutional Convention attempted to scale back political influence.

These developments placed the Democratically-controlled convention in the unenviable position of having to balance its criticisms of the war amid renewed faith and interest in the conflict from citizens across Illinois. Analysis of these battles stole coverage from the convention’s activities in both Springfield newspapers. Republicans, however, were again quick to tie the body with treason. They claimed Democratic leaders attempted to impede progress and withhold resources for soldiers, with greater success this time around. As the convention wrapped up its duties on March 24, Springfield Republicans – for the first time since the 1861 summer – quickly dismissed their party’s internal differences over emancipation as they united in an effort to rebuff this Democratic constitution. Unlike the November 1861 election to elect members to the convention, John Edward Young recognized “considerable interest manifested in

⁴⁸ Mercy Conkling to Clinton Conkling, February 24, April 14, 1862, Conkling Family Collection, ALPLM.

⁴⁹ "An Illinois Farmer during the Civil War," 99.

this election” before he eventually “voated” against it.⁵⁰ But relatively few Democrats had been convinced to change their minds. Democratic supporters remained resolute that their vision and support for the war was unharmed, yet also united that a good amount of the proposed constitution pleased its constituency. Voters would approve or reject the proposed constitution in June. Once the convention adjourned, as Illinois historian Arthur Cole explained, “the real fight began.”⁵¹

Partisanship consumed the Illinois capital between the close of the convention and voting day. The proposed state constitution was a regular topic of conversation in the city, and the outcome looked less predictable as the two parties and their respective newspaper editors accelerated attacks against each other. Critics of the constitution continued to suspect the loyalty of anyone who still questioned any element of the war. “You would be surprised how many [Southern] symphesers they have here among our ladies,” Mercy Conkling wrote her son in mid-March.⁵² One evening in late April, Milton Hay attended a dinner party in Springfield where guests “locked horns” over political issues. When it came to discussion of the new state constitution, “[a] pretty strong secesh crowd” outnumbered Hay and his Republican visitors by favoring it.⁵³ Thomas S. Pinckard, a military officer from Springfield who resigned his commission in March 1862 due to illness, returned to town to witness the end of the proceedings. He told Lincoln’s secretary John G. Nicolay that the convention was “making it self contemptible as possible,” and that leading Democrats appeared “determined to politically damn

⁵⁰ Ibid, 100.

⁵¹ Cole, *The Era of the Civil War*, 269.

⁵² Mercy Conkling to Clinton Conkling, March 19, 1862, Conkling Family Collection, ALPLM.

⁵³ Milton Hay to Mary Hay, April 27, 1862, Stuart-Hay Collection, ALPLM.

themselves in Illinois.”⁵⁴ Democrats grasped the connection made by their opponents: “We have been told, time and again, to vote for the new constitution is treason!” the *Register* noted. “Are all who [vote] for the ‘swindle’ to be counted ‘secessionists?’” the editor gasped, likening votes in support of the constitution as tantamount to praising “Jeff. Davis!” If so, he concluded, “Old Sangamon — ever trusty, ever true, is treasonous!”⁵⁵

Before concluding its work, convention members had to determine whether they would allow Illinois soldiers in the field an opportunity to vote on the proposed constitution. Most Democrats in the convention discouraged this motion, aware that the vast majority of soldiers had already spoken out against its passage. Illinois soldiers were in fact some of the biggest opponents of the convention and the constitution, including some self-identified Democrats.⁵⁶ Mason Brayman, a Springfield Democrat and friend of Lincoln who enlisted and fought in the West, planned to vote against the constitution.⁵⁷ The captain of the 38th Illinois from Springfield admitted to the governor that his “Regiment is undoubtedly Democratic, but not much disposed to draw party lines rather conservative.”⁵⁸ In other words, they believed the proposed constitution was politically excessive. Edward Ingraham mentioned the excitement that the constitution produced at Camp Butler near Springfield. Before soldiers held a mock election, Ingraham predicted “nine out of ten will vote against it, I shall.”⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Thomas S. Pinckard to John G. Nicolay, March 13, 1862, LOC

⁵⁵ *Daily Illinois State Register*, June 20, 1862.

⁵⁶ Oliver Morton Dickerson, *The Illinois Constitutional Convention of 1862* (Urbana, IL: University Press of Illinois, 1905), 24.

⁵⁷ Richard Yates to Abraham Lincoln, July 26, 1862, Bailhache-Brayman Collection, ALPLM.

⁵⁸ Henry N. Alden to Richard Yates, April 12, 1862, Yates Collection, ALPLM.

⁵⁹ Edward Ingraham to Alice Chase, May 21, 1862, Ingraham Family Collection, ALPLM.

Convention members cited the 1848 constitution that prevented absentee voting as precedent in the matter. But when Republicans again cried that such a move was unpatriotic because it denied troops volunteering in defense of the Union a chance to speak out on political matters, the Democratic leadership conceded and permitted soldier voting on the new constitution. However, commissioners charged with gathering votes from the field failed to complete their mission, thus depriving troops from influencing the results.⁶⁰ Illinois volunteers did not soon forget this detail. When Ashley Alexander's company at Camp Butler received orders to police the vote in Springfield, he and nearly forty other soldiers "Mountid" their horses and headed to town "to guard the Arsnall and to keep piece at the election off the new constitution." Though his regiment was unable to vote because of the "dand secesh" and "the dand Democrat[s]" in the state, Alexander trusted his brother "voted against [it] I hope."⁶¹

Voters ultimately rejected the proposed constitution across the state and in Springfield. "ILLINOIS IS SAVED FROM THE GRASP OF TRAITORS" ran the *Journal* headline after the election, "... and the National Union rescued from its great impending danger. We breathe freer!"⁶² "[W]e have had a very exciting election for the New Constitution!" Mercy Conkling wrote, "Resulting as is now conceded in its defeat, and consequently in victory to the republican party."⁶³ Despite vigorous campaigning by each side, opponents of the constitution outnumbered proponents in the capital 1,161 to 912, a difference of 249 votes.⁶⁴ The margin was wider across the state. State Treasurer William Butler happily informed Lincoln that the constitution went

⁶⁰ Dickerson, *The Illinois Constitutional Convention of 1862*, 24.

⁶¹ Ashley H. Alexander to "Brother and Sister," June 24, 1862, Alexander-Ackerly Collection, ALPLM.

⁶² *Daily Illinois State Journal*, June 23, 1862.

⁶³ Mercy Conkling to Clinton Conkling, June 23, 1862, Conkling Family Collection, ALPLM.

⁶⁴ *Daily Illinois State Register*, June 17, 1862.

down by ten thousand votes. (The final margin was 16,051.) The soldier count, Butler added, “will make it twenty five thousand if taken.”⁶⁵ Votes from troops in the field never made it into the final count, yet opponents still won handily without them.

Three factors explain the constitution’s defeat in Springfield and across the state. The first was the changing nature of the war, but it went beyond those previously mentioned battles. During the interim, the Union scored a major military victory in the Battle of Shiloh in early April. Not only was it the most noteworthy Northern triumph thus far in the war, it also brought a heavy burden to the community as local and familiar names lined the casualty lists that filtered in afterward. The city’s collective mourning following Shiloh briefly shifted attention away from the contentious constitution.

Secondly, what politicking occurred before voting day favored critics of the proposed draft. Republicans attacked the convention from the beginning for taking on legislative powers it never possessed. The *Journal* summed up Democratic defeat in the following manner: “They had made provisions for the state administration so they could elect anti-war men in place of the present faithful state officers. They were felicitating themselves that they were about to open a fire in the rear of the Union cause—but the best laid schemes have come to naught.”⁶⁶ State Republican leaders mounted a formidable campaign during the interim against the convention’s Democratic majority and their proposed constitution, far better than their efforts to rally support for the November 1861 election. Locals heard frequent references to the convention and its leadership as “the Egyptian Swindle,” “the Convention Oligarchy,” and “the Springfield Conspirators,” giving Republicans a clear rhetorical edge in the debate. They characterized all

⁶⁵ William Butler to Abraham Lincoln, June 21, 1862, Lincoln Collection, LOC; Cole, *The Era of the Civil War*, 271.

⁶⁶ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, June 23, 1862.

Democrats as part of the “Golden Circle” and the “Vallandigham Democracy,” the latter a derogatory reference to the Ohio congressman who vehemently opposed the war and was the North’s foremost Copperhead. Republican leaders also poured anti-constitution pamphlets into Illinois, and Republican-appointed postmasters willingly distributed this material throughout the state. Even Democrats expected defeat before the election took place. Benjamin S. Edwards, one of two Springfield Democrats nominated to the convention, predicted his constituents in town would reject the constitution, and he was ultimately proven correct.⁶⁷

Race was the third explanation. The only part of the proposed convention that resonated with the majority of white Springfield voters was a feature limiting the rights and freedoms of African Americans in Illinois. *Register* editor Charles Lanphier urged his Democratic followers before the election to vote for the new constitution or risk losing to a group “seeking to turn Illinois into an African ‘city of refuge.’”⁶⁸ But this tactic backfired when the convention crafted separate bills concerning the future status of blacks in the state that had no bearing on the outcome of the proposed constitution. Put simply, Democrats did not hold a monopoly on anti-black attitudes in the city. Even the pro-administration *Journal* “confess[ed] that we have, in common with nineteen twentieths of our people a prejudice against the nigger, but we do not hold on that account that we are bound to vote the Democratic ticket.”⁶⁹ Of the 2,062 Springfield ballots cast on the question of whether to ban blacks and mulattoes from migrating or settling in the state, 1,929, or roughly ninety-four percent, approved. An even larger share of eligible voters favored measures denying black suffrage and black office-holding in the state. For perspective,

⁶⁷ B.S. Edwards to William W. Orme, June 11, 1862, Orme Collection, ALPLM; Willaim B. Hesseltine, *Lincoln and the War Governors* (New York: Knopf, 1955), 239.

⁶⁸ *Daily Illinois State Register*, February 1, June 4, 11, 1862.

⁶⁹ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, March 22, 1862.

eighty-four percent of the city's eligible voters supported a restriction on black immigration into Illinois as part of the 1848 constitution. In each of these votes, fourteen years apart, eligible white residents in Springfield demonstrated little sympathy living alongside African-Americans or extending rights to those already there.⁷⁰

Republican vindication followed the constitution's rejection and the party was certain that public opinion had shifted back in its favor. The war's outlook appeared promising and their political rivals had trouble recovering from the constitution's defeat. Democrats in Springfield would indeed endure a long and discouraging 1862 summer. The reality, however, was that Republican unity was still a long way off, this recent political victory notwithstanding. Beneath its surface the party remained divided over emancipation, an issue largely sidestepped during the height of the constitutional convention. Internal debates over abolition reemerged that summer despite the *Journal's* best efforts to deny a rift among its members. In the president's hometown this split pitted Governor Richard Yates against Lincoln's moderate political allies in Springfield, exposing this underlying friction that contrasted with the party's elation in the aftermath of the constitution's defeat.

Governor Yates frequently expressed disappointment with his fellow Illinois Republican in the White House, seemingly in constant disagreement with Lincoln's performance since the beginning of the war. For one, Yates was still upset that Lincoln had refused his request for troops in order to check Democratic anarchy during the constitutional convention. But part of this frustration emerged from the uniqueness of Civil War itself. Fighting for the Union brought

⁷⁰ *Daily Illinois State Register*, June 17, 1862; Winkle, *The Young Eagle*, 261.

challenges to the concept of state sovereignty, and governors feared their authority was at stake as the federal government assumed more responsibility and power over the course of the war.⁷¹

Yates was particularly concerned about his role as Illinois's commander-in-chief as part of this transition. Yates deemed his standing as that of a father to his state's troops off at war, a belief all governors shared throughout the conflict. Likewise, these soldiers looked to their state, not the federal government, when they needed supplies or reassurances from home. In his role as commander-in-chief, Yates spared nothing in his attempts to acquire for his volunteers the best clothing and arms available, well above the state's allocated budget. In fact, the Democratic leadership of the Constitutional Convention presumed that Yates had distributed these funds improperly and opened an investigation to determine whether this spending had increased the state's debt. Whether this was a genuine gesture for the Illinois volunteer fighting in the South or a selfish ploy to gain political leverage, or perhaps both, Yates cherished his newfound reputation as the "Soldiers' Friend." He advocated for pay increases to Illinois soldiers and for those disabled from conflict. He also provided comfort to Illinois troops stationed at Fort Donelson, Shiloh, and Vicksburg, these men grateful for a presence from home and enamored by the governor's famed speaking abilities.⁷²

As one would suspect, some regarded Yates's actions as self-fulfilling, unconvinced that the governor had any interest in the well-being of others. Most Democrats interpreted Yates's deeds as attempts to boost his political hopes; it was no secret that he coveted a U.S. Senate seat. They mocked his generous nature with constant reminders of his fondness for booze. "Glorious Dick Yates is on his travels," the *Register* once remarked, trailed by his band of "bottle holders,"

⁷¹ See Hesseltine, *Lincoln and the War Governors*, 4-5.

⁷² Jack Nortrup, "Richard Yates: A Personal Glimpse of the Illinois Soldiers' Friend," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (1908-1984)* 56, no. 2 (1963): 123-126, 133.

one after the other eager to flatter the governor. After the Battle at Shiloh the *Jonesboro Weekly Gazette* informed its readership that the governor's lengthy absence "traveling up and down the Tennessee River with a crowd of truculent toadies, indulging freely in good liquor and cigars, and electioneering ... [was] at the expense of the taxpayers of Illinois."⁷³

That said, Yates's travels swayed one Springfield Democrat to his defense. After coming across a negative article on the governor's leadership habits, Parthenia Hall – a self-described member of the "opposite party to yourself" yet a Democrat of "the old constitution and the old flag" – had nothing but praise for the governor's efforts during their venture south following the major battle at Shiloh. Hall confessed "that calumniators had prejudiced me against you," but the "disinterested kindness and the real feeling I saw you show for the poor suffering of our humiliated countrymen inspired me with the highest respect and gratitude for yourself and those who aid you." "I should consider myself an ungrateful wretch, after all the kindness you extended to us," Hall continued, "& all the pleasures you sacrificed, for the benefit, and comfort of those on board, I mean (the sick wounded and lowly in position)[.]"⁷⁴ Receiving a letter such as this one, by a Democrat no less, only reinforced the governor's self-importance of himself. After observing the aftermath of a battle firsthand, Yates believed that he was in a foremost position to speak out on the war and its desired course, even if his views put him at odds with his party.

The radical Yates constantly pressed Lincoln to pursue the rebels without restraint. Feeling the political winds at his back following the demise of the new state constitution, Yates resumed his public critiques of the moderate approach taken by the White House. This method revealed the open split within the Republican Party inside Illinois's Capitol building. In fact,

⁷³ *Daily Illinois State Register*, March 10, 1864; *Jonesboro Weekly Gazette*, May 31, 1862, in *ibid*, 136.

⁷⁴ Mrs. Parthenia Hall to Gov. Yates, May 25, 1862, Yates Collection, ALPLM.

Yates was so disgusted with Lincoln's policy that rumors floated of the governor's refusal to talk with officers sent to Springfield to help organize regiments and some of Lincoln's closest political allies, including the Illinois Secretary of State Ozias M. Hatch.⁷⁵ The tipping point came in July when Secretary of War Edwin Stanton assigned a fixed number of recruits each state was required to meet or else a draft would be implemented. In 1861, shortly after the federal surrender of Fort Sumter, Yates was furious he had to turn away men because the state had already exceeded the number of volunteers allowed. Now, one year later and with the threat of a draft hanging over his state, Yates was upset that he might not be able to fill Illinois's mandatory quota.

Yates again encouraged able-bodied men throughout the state not yet in the military to "rally once again for the old flag, for our country, Union and Liberty" and to ask once more "what is even life worth, if your government is lost?"⁷⁶ A few days later, however, Yates turned his attention toward the White House by urging Lincoln to employ "sterner measures" in the fight against the enemy. "The conservative policy has utterly failed," the Illinois governor wrote in a July 11 letter to the president. It was now time to "accept the services of all loyal men" into the armies, including black soldiers. "Shall we sit supinely by, and see the war sweep off the youth and strength of the land, and refuse aid from that class of men, who are at least worthy foes of traitors and the murderers of our Government and of our children[?]"⁷⁷ Yates hoped this

⁷⁵ Charles Sellon to O. M Hatch, Pittsfield, June 5, 1862, Hatch Collection, ALPLM; Richard Yates to Abraham Lincoln, August 27, 1862, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

⁷⁶ "Proclamation of Gov. Yates," July 1862, Yates Collection, ALPLM; Hesseltine, *Lincoln and the War Governors*, 200-201.

⁷⁷ Richard Yates to Abraham Lincoln, July 11, 1862, Yates Collection, ALPLM.

public message might change Lincoln's thinking. "Let loyalty, and that alone, be the dividing line between the nation and its foes."⁷⁸

Logically, coming from the governor of the president's home state, Yates's letter received wide attention. Newspapers across the North reprinted the letter that challenged the White House to strike at Southern slavery and accepting African-American men into the conflict.⁷⁹ Afterward, letters of support poured into the Governor's Mansion from across the state and the country sharing Yates's sentiments. One letter read, "Mr. Lincoln is a great and good man, but he does not seem to comprehend the awful crisis that is upon the nation," while another praised Yates for having "touched the cord that rings the bell of Liberty." A third Illinois soldier shared his thoughts on how Lincoln might be persuaded to shift strategy: "Could not the governors of the loyal states act in common on the means to influence the president to drive his generals to a speedy termination of the war?"⁸⁰ While some in Springfield still had faith in the White House and its means of carrying out the war, others demanded aggressiveness from their political leaders. For these individuals Governor Yates was their spokesman.

Privately, Lincoln was already moving in this direction when Yates circulated his public letter to the White House. The president was still mulling over the strategic implications of emancipation, particularly in the Border States. And because Lincoln contemplated these ramifications in secret, his only response to Yates's letter was a request for patience: "Dick, hold still and see the salvation of God."⁸¹

⁷⁸ Hesseltine, *Lincoln and the War Governors*, 202, 249.

⁷⁹ Hubbard, *Illinois's War*, 88.

⁸⁰ Hesseltine, *Lincoln and the War Governors*, 250, 253.

⁸¹ Richard Yates to Abraham Lincoln, July 11, 1862, Yates Collection, ALPLM; Yates to Trumbull, February 14, 1862, in Cole, *The Era of the Civil War*, 277; Cole, "President Lincoln and the Illinois Radical Republicans," 426; Krug, *Lyman Trumbull: Conservative Radical*, 217.

Emancipation and the 1862 Election

Despite internal issues over the party's responsibilities, optimism endured as Republicans prepared for the fall campaign season. More than enough men responded to Lincoln's call for additional troops that summer, putting fears of a potential draft to rest. Six weeks after his critical letter to the president, Yates happily reported that Illinois would "have 50,000 enrolled volunteers for three years service," and the governor wondered if the state might receive credit for the excess number of men that signed up.⁸² Others appealed to Lincoln directly: "An immense number of people are here. Many counties tender a regiment. Can we say that all will be accepted under call for the war[?]" The scene was as close to emulating the enthusiastic environment in the Illinois capital following Fort Sumter's fall. At an enlistment rally on July 22, originally scheduled inside the State House, a larger than expected gathering forced the event outdoors into the scorching heat.⁸³

As in 1861, the widespread presence of recruits in Springfield again gave the city an appearance of a military fort. "It is nothing but war, war, all the time," one young resident explained to her uncle, "holding war meetings, talking about the war and who has gone and who is going." More men enlisted in the Army, "a great many that otherwise would not have gone," with the prospect of a draft and with Springfield serving as a major recruitment hub. "There is scarcely anything thought or talked of but the war," John Edward Young wrote in his diary on August 7. "Our state is one vast recruiting camp." Eugene Gross, an attorney in Springfield, assisted with the recruitment effort in town, describing "[t]he whole city ... ablaze with

⁸² Richard Yates to Edwin Stanton, August 20, 1862; Yates to Abraham Lincoln, August 23, 1862, Yates Collection, ALPLM.

⁸³ O. M. Hatch, J. K. Dubois, William Butler, and A. G. Fuller to Abraham Lincoln, August 8, 1862, Hatch Collection, ALPLM.

excitement.” Aside from the recurring problems with outfitting and providing enough resources for these volunteers, the fact that men responded to Lincoln’s call for troops that summer distracted Springfield Republicans from their internal disputes, but only momentarily. The party’s unresolved issues would come back to haunt them as the fall 1862 elections approached.⁸⁴

Springfield Democrats, on the other hand, were quite glum over their party’s prospects heading into the campaign. That year’s sparsely attended state convention in Springfield paled to the turnout of a typical meeting, and a lack of confidence seeped throughout the gathering. Illinois Republican Senator Orville Browning learned from party leaders privately that they predicted a defeat equivalent to the one in June.⁸⁵ Additionally, the large soldier presence in the area from the recent call for troops prevented many from publicly condemning the war.⁸⁶ In fact, Benjamin S. Edwards, prominent local Democrat and Springfield representative of the constitutional convention, actually encouraged men to enlist after that summer’s call for volunteers.⁸⁷

The one issue uniting the party, however, was abhorrence to emancipation. The only time this benefitted the party was when public unrest replaced enthusiasm over the war. This was the sentiment as the 1862 summer wore on with little Union momentum evident following exhilarating news from the battlefield earlier that year. On the eve of the state’s Democratic Convention in Springfield, party leadership for the second consecutive year rejected Republican

⁸⁴ Lutie Bennett to “Uncle Ned,” August 8, 1862, Ingraham Family Collection, ALPLM; “An Illinois Farmer during the Civil War,” 101. Eugene L. Gross to Unknown, August 14, 1862, Bailhache-Brayman Collection, ALPLM; Richard Yates to Gen. H. G. Wright, August 24, 1862, Yates Collection, ALPLM.

⁸⁵ Bruce S. Allardice, ““Illinois is Rotten With Traitors!”: The Republican Defeat in the 1862 Election,” *ibid.*104(Spring 2011): 102.

⁸⁶ John Lindsey to Nancy Lindsey, August 27, 1862, John Lindsey Collection, ALPLM.

⁸⁷ Quinn, “Lincoln’s Springfield in the Civil War,” 33.

invitations to merge under a Union platform. Instead, the party expressed its commitment to the U.S. Constitution by denouncing Northern and Southern extremists who violated its original intent. Democrats especially condemned anything remotely affecting slavery as part of a war strategy, directing their ire at abolitionists such as Governor Yates for their crusade against the institution. Democrats argued their party represented the true Union platform that Republicans had attempted to claim in 1861.⁸⁸

No individual better expressed that sentiment than William A. Richardson of Quincy. Richardson, Illinois's Fifth District U. S. Representative in Washington, was one of those Democrats initially reluctant to put his full support behind the Union cause after Sumter, but fell in line after Douglas's impassioned speech in the State House ten days later. Now, nearly sixteen months after the Little Giant's appeal to set aside partisanship, Richardson adamantly opposed a war that expanded beyond bringing the seceded states back into the country. On the last day of the party's convention that fall, Richardson admitted his continued support for the war and the Union, but he rejected implementing measures such as confiscation and emancipation as a means to those ends. Emancipation was a distraction from the war, he declared, not a military necessity. Furthermore, freedom for slaves would not achieve peace; focusing solely on reunification was the only way to win the war, not by coupling it with a commitment to, as he put it, "niggerism." Going further, Richardson was troubled that radical Republicans envisioned an equal society with their "one friend and that is the nigger." Slavery was the ideal situation for black men and women, he said, adding, "The nigger in the free states is inferior to the nigger in slave states."⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Allardice, "'Illinois is Rotten With Traitors!'," 102; Tap, "Race, Rhetoric, and Emancipation," 107-108; Smith, *No Party Now*, 52.

⁸⁹ *Daily Illinois State Register*, September 17, 1862; Tap, "Race, Rhetoric, and Emancipation," 103, 108.

Far from being a minority view, Richardson's statements reflected the attitudes of many in Lincoln's hometown and throughout the state, Republicans and Democrats alike. Lutie Bennett, a young woman in town, expressed concern around the same time that her uncle was an "abolishonist." She wrote to him, "I hoped that after you had seen more of the nigger in his proper place you would have concluded he was not such a superior being as the abolishionests make him out to be." To her dismay, "there has been more white men killed than all the negroes in the south are worth."⁹⁰ Soldiers stationed at Camp Butler recognized the town's anti-black disdain. Since arriving in central Illinois, Presley T. Peek realized, "I am no longer afraid of the niggers being set up in this state." He had never seen so many "nigrow haters" before, including men from his company. "Our captain told us that if they were here when we came back that we would turn in and whip them out. So pore fellows their case is to be pittied." "There is but two negrows in camp and they are imployed as cooks," Peek continued, and "I assure you the negrows is not what they are fighting for or at least it is not what we are going to fight for."⁹¹

Worse yet, one day after the "wildest joy" erupted in the aftermath at the Battle of Antietam – an encounter that historian James McPherson described as "a strategic Union success," if not a decisive one – Secretary of War Edwin Stanton ordered former slaves currently stationed in southern Illinois be shipped throughout the state to help with the upcoming fall harvest.⁹² The growing number of former slaves in Cairo concerned military authorities there, and Stanton rationalized that sending some northward would help farms hampered by the loss of

⁹⁰ Lutie Bennett to Uncle Ned, October 12, 1862, Ingraham Family Collection, ALPLM.

⁹¹ Presley T. Peek to "Brothers and Sisters," August 20, 1862, Camp Butler Collection, Sangamon Valley Collection.

⁹² McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 545.

men to the Army.⁹³ Four days later, Lincoln issued the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, the historic measure freeing all slaves held in rebel-occupied territory on January 1, 1863. These two measures made it official: the war now included the abolition of slaves as well as the resettlement (according to Springfield Democrats) of former slaves into Northern states.

Space dedicated to military progress in the Democratic *Register* gave way to columns excoriating the president and radicals for this perceived blatant overreach of governmental power. Two days after the Proclamation was issued, editor Charles Lanphier suggested the act was “an admission that the government has ceased to rely upon the military force placed at its disposal, the hundreds of thousands of men and millions of money at its command, to put down the rebellion, but resorts to paper threats as an auxiliary.”⁹⁴ The president’s position on slavery had changed since his days living in Springfield, Lanphier claimed, and not for the best. Lanphier preferred Lincoln’s response he once gave to a Chicago man who desired emancipation. Lincoln reportedly said: “You remember the slave who asked his master — ‘If I should call a sheep's tail a leg, how many legs would it have?’ ‘Five.’ ‘No, only four, for my calling the tail a leg would not make it so.’ Now, gentlemen, if I say to the slaves ‘you are free,’ they will be no more free than at present.”⁹⁵ And while other Democrats in the city shared their party organ’s views, few spoke publicly for fear of being arrested.

Those satisfied with the Proclamation, on the other hand, freely expressed their support without repercussion. William Herndon was proud of his partner’s courage, telling him, “You can go down on the other side of life filled with the consciousness of duty done blazing with

⁹³ Tap, "Race, Rhetoric, and Emancipation," 108-109; Allardice, "'Illinois is Rotten With Traitors!'," 105.

⁹⁴ *Daily Illinois State Register*, September 24, 1862.

⁹⁵ *Daily Illinois State Register*, September 23, 1862.

eternal glory.”⁹⁶ Francis Springer, former chaplain of Springfield’s First Lutheran Church, said, “The czar of Russia did not make a mightier or more heroic effort than that just made by the President.”⁹⁷ The *Springfield Journal*, ever faithful to Lincoln and his evolving views, wrote, “The act is the most important and the most memorable of his official career — no event in the history of this country since the Declaration of Independence itself has excited so profound attention either at home or abroad.”⁹⁸ State Auditor Jesse K. Dubois transmitted “the unanimous approbation of our Republican friends and all Loyal Democrats” to the man in the White House.⁹⁹

Those Republicans who hesitated to publicly applaud the Proclamation, however, questioned its timing just ahead of the upcoming election. As one might suspect, the two measures, coming so close together and so recently, completely changed the dynamics of the party’s statewide convention set to open in Springfield on September 24. The main question facing organizers was whether to fully endorse these actions or withhold comment in order to retain as many votes as possible; condemning them was not an option as it would imply that the party was not behind its leader. It therefore depended on who controlled the Republican convention in order to gauge how much emphasis the platform would place on emancipation.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon*, 160. Donald has pointed out that Herndon recalled this statement many years after the war, so any literal transcription should be used with caution.

⁹⁷ Francis Springer to Newton Bateman, September 30, 1862, found in Tap, "Race, Rhetoric, and Emancipation," 110.

⁹⁸ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, September 24, 1862.

⁹⁹ Jesse K. Dubois to Abraham Lincoln, October 6, 1862, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

¹⁰⁰ Jesse Weik, another of Lincoln’s political allies in Illinois, was one who worried that radicals might try to press their influence, and advised the Secretary of State in Springfield to “look after your central counties or the zealots will overwhelm you in the convention.” See Jesse Weik to Ozias M. Hatch, September 6, 1862, Hatch Collection, ALPLM. This concern extended beyond the convention. One week before the Republican gathering, one Springfielder wondered if Republican leaders had “settled down upon any particular candidate?” and “who will the central part of the State support[?]” See [Unknown] to O.M. Hatch, September 17, 1862, Hatch Collection, ALPLM.

A majority of the crowd apparently supported emancipation, but more moderate members commanded the convention and attempted to shift attention away from the measures by focusing primarily on the war. The committee producing the party platform was therefore silent on emancipation when delivering its resolutions aloud to the mass rally.¹⁰¹

This neglect prompted Owen Lovejoy, U. S. Representative from Northern Illinois, to interject. The abolitionist Lovejoy approached the podium, ignoring cries to return to his seat, and spoke until he convinced the governing body to add a resolution endorsing Lincoln's Proclamation.¹⁰² Of all the "excellent speeches" one soldier in the crowd heard that day, the congressman's rhetorical skills triumphed by persuading convention members to adopt "the proclamation of freedom & confiscation" and unanimously declaring the act "as a great & imperative War measure essential to the salvation of the Union & we hereby all pledge all truly loyal Citizens to sustain him in its Complete and faithful Enforcement."¹⁰³

The revised platform went further. It identified anyone who condemned the Proclamation, now considered a necessary component to ending the war, as a turncoat. Anyone still advocating peace or compromise "while a rebel battalion is in the field" was as much of a disunionist as Jefferson Davis. "The only parties opposed to the proclamation are the traitors of the South and those whom they regard as their allies in the North," the platform read.

Alternatively, every Republican candidate running for office that fall, "State and county, legislative and congressional," had pledged support for Lincoln's Proclamation and the soldiers who had demonstrated the utmost "patriotism and glory" thus far in the war. "We ask you, then,

¹⁰¹ William F. Moore and Jane Ann Moore, eds., *Owen Lovejoy: His Brother's Blood: Speeches and Writings, 1838-64* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 354.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Samuel Gordon to Wife, September 26, 1862, Samuel Gordon Collection, ALPLM; Francis A. Hoffman to Abraham Lincoln, September 25, 1862, Lincoln Collection, LOC. Hoffman cheerfully sent Lincoln a telegram highlighting the convention's acceptance of emancipation.

on which side should patriotic citizens vote?" In a complete reversal from the convention leaders' planned platform of avoiding comment on the Proclamation from one day earlier, they now rejected arguments that emancipation was unconstitutional or unrelated to the war's overall success.¹⁰⁴ "Why," asked Ebon Ingersoll, a War Democrat running for the state's at-large U.S. congressional seat, "are all these Democrats afraid of injuring the rebels by confiscating their property or negroes?"¹⁰⁵ Samuel Gordon, a soldier from western Illinois stationed at Camp Butler, attended the event and mentioned in a letter to his wife that "[e]very mention of old Abes name in connection with his late proclamation drew from the tremendous applause[.] I think the President has struck the blow in the right time[.] The beginning of the end of the war is plainly visable."¹⁰⁶ Those in attendance left the rally with more confidence than when they arrived, optimistic that this encouraging mood would translate to victory at the polls in early November.

If Republicans were hopeful, Democrats were outright giddy as the conclusion of these conventions typically marked the official start of the campaign. Democrats blasted the "Abolition Convention" and accused radicals in charge for perpetuating racial amalgamation. These initial Democratic volleys set the tone for the party's attacks against their rivals, arguing that Republicans were attempting to "Africanize" the state by welcoming "these negroes with demonstrations of the greatest delight."¹⁰⁷ Emancipation was the key election issue in town, and the U.S. Congressional race for the Eighth District demonstrated this divide, one of the most captivating and critical contests that year.

¹⁰⁴ "TO THE VOTERS OF ILLINOIS. Address of the Republican Union State Central Committee," 1862, Republican Union State Central Committee Collection, ALPLM.

¹⁰⁵ Allardice, "'Illinois is Rotten With Traitors!'," 102.

¹⁰⁶ Samuel Gordon to Wife, September 26, 1862, Samuel Gordon Collection, ALPLM.

¹⁰⁷ *Daily Illinois State Register*, September 29, 1862.

Running on the Democratic ticket was John T. Stuart, Lincoln's cousin-in-law and first law partner after moving to Springfield. Similar to Lincoln, Stuart emigrated from Kentucky as a young man and served in the Black Hawk War. Stuart was a Whig for much of his adult life, once having defeated Stephen A. Douglas for a U.S. Congressional seat in 1838. After the collapse of the Whigs Stuart declared himself a man without a party. In 1860, he unsuccessfully ran for Illinois's governorship as a Constitutional Union candidate that nationally nominated John Bell of Tennessee for president. Despite competing political views over recent years, Stuart in April 1861 admitted his "personal attachment and respect for you which I have maintained for thirty years -- is as sincere now as it ever was -- notwithstanding our difference in politics and I hope you every succes for you -- and our common country."¹⁰⁸

Stuart was still a proponent of the war in 1862, but he feared emancipation was too excessive.¹⁰⁹ His platform sought an end to the rebellion through constitutional means. He ran as a Democratic candidate – the first time he had affiliated with a major party since his time as a Whig – because it stressed “the Union, the Constitution, and the enforcement of the laws” that he likewise shared. Stuart had no problem with slavery existing in the Southern states; he and the majority of Springfield's Democracy identified as conservative Unionists because they supported the overthrow of the rebellion but were equally repulsed by abolitionism as they were Copperheadism, the peace plank of the Democratic Party.¹¹⁰

In one of his first public statements after receiving the Democratic nomination, Stuart voiced his longstanding respect for Lincoln and admitted he “would rather aid than embarrass”

¹⁰⁸ John T. Stuart to Abraham Lincoln, April 3, 1861, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

¹⁰⁹ Harry E. Pratt, "The Repudiation of Lincoln's War Policy in 1862: Stuart-Swett Congressional Campaign," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 24, no. 1 (1931): 136.

¹¹⁰ John Todd Stuart, "To the Voters of the Eighth Congressional District," August 30, 1862, Stuart-Hay Collection, ALPLM; Smith, *No Party Now*, 52, 85.

his longtime friend in the White House. Stuart worried radicals within the Republican Party had too much influence on Lincoln's administration, a concern others in Springfield shared. If elected, Stuart vowed he would urge the president to continue pursuing the Confederacy through "the ample powers conferred upon you by the Constitution, and repulse from you any faction, if such there be, which would goad you into a resort to revolutionary means." Unlike most Democratic candidates running that year, Stuart promised to work with, not against, Lincoln in bringing an end to the war.¹¹¹

On the Republican ticket was another lawyer, former Whig, and friend of Lincoln, Leonard Swett of Bloomington. While Swett and Stuart knew each other from the legal circuits and their associations with Lincoln – the two would in fact play substantial roles in the president's burial in 1865 – the similarities ended there. Swett was originally from Maine and served in the Mexican War before becoming one of the original founders of the Republican Party in Illinois. He served one term in the state legislature from 1858-1860, worked on Lincoln's two senatorial campaigns, and was one of Lincoln's managers at the 1860 Republican National Convention in Chicago. The State Committee unanimously selected Swett as its preferred choice to run for the Eighth District Republican seat in 1862, and Abraham Lincoln concurred.¹¹²

Before receiving the nomination, Swett stumped with the president at a Union Mass Meeting in front of the U.S. Capitol to rally public support following recent Eastern military setbacks. "It is the duty of the sailors, in the storm, to stand by the ropes and man the yards, not to quarrel with the Captain about the conduct of the ship," Swett pleaded. "Let Father Abraham

¹¹¹ John Todd Stuart, "To the Voters of the Eighth Congressional District," August 30, 1862, Stuart-Hay Collection, ALPLM.

¹¹² Pratt, "The Repudiation of Lincoln's War Policy in 1862," 134-135; Robert S. Eckley, "Lincoln's Intimate Friend: Leonard Swett," *ibid.* 92, no. 3 (Autumn 1999): 275.

man the helm, and let us obey.”¹¹³ Swett’s appeal, however, came weeks before Lincoln issued the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. Once delivered, however, the measure instantly disrupted Swett’s campaign.

The Proclamation caught Swett completely by surprise. In fact, after a one-on-one meeting with the president during his Washington visit in August, Swett left convinced Lincoln would abstain from touching slavery altogether. The president had been mulling over a preliminary proclamation of emancipation that summer, and Lincoln invited Swett to the White House to review it. Swett assumed the meeting was more of an opportunity for Lincoln to talk through the arguments for and against emancipation aloud. “His manner did not indicate that he wished to impress his views *upon* his hearer,” Swett explained afterward, “but rather to weigh and examine them for his own enlightenment *in the presence* of his hearer.” Swett left with the impression that Lincoln was nowhere nearer a decision than he was before entering the building. Swett reassured his wife after the meeting that Lincoln “will issue no proclamation emancipating negroes.”¹¹⁴

Six weeks later, with the campaign underway, Swett had been proven wrong and was forced to adapt accordingly. Swett initially sensed an advantage and he challenged Stuart to a series of debates. Swett attempted to bait his opponent in to speaking ill of the president on the stump, aware that Stuart was unlikely to do so. Stuart therefore turned down Swett’s challenge, citing his worry that either of them might end up arrested for saying something considered treasonable. Swett scoffed at this reaction and detected weakness in Stuart after the order was issued, saying, “The proclamation fell upon him like an exploding shell and since then he has not

¹¹³ Eckley, "Lincoln's Intimate Friend: Leonard Swett," 283.

¹¹⁴ Donald, *Lincoln*, 366.

known what to say.”¹¹⁵ After continued attacks to his character, however, Stuart appeared spontaneously in the Illinois town of Lincoln one afternoon to debate Swett, the latter already there for a scheduled speaking engagement. Each admitted their personal respect for Lincoln and his handling of the war, but emancipation was another matter. Swett defended the Proclamation, while Stuart questioned its necessity without technically denouncing it. Stuart claimed that the Proclamation went beyond the authority of the commander-in-chief, saying, “the constitution was broad enough to put down the rebellion without any violation of it.”¹¹⁶

Swett and fellow Republicans thought they could turn the Proclamation – with lots of convincing – to their advantage, but another development thwarted that goal.¹¹⁷ Trains from the military headquarters at Cairo began transporting ex-slaves throughout the state in early October. White Illinoisans were both angered and anxious with this development, especially since voters overwhelmingly favored a “Negro Exclusion” law as part of the Constitutional Convention election back in June. Shortly after the Republican convention concluded in September, the *Register* claimed that “[t]he first instalment of this negro influx, for Springfield, arrived here on Saturday. There are, we learn, more coming, further to violate our constitution and laws.”¹¹⁸ These “black locusts” were merely “the first fruits of emancipation,” Democrats roared. The *Register* and fellow Democratic presses pushed this fear all the way to Election Day.

Republicans likewise understood how much harm this might bring to their chances in November. Lincoln received appeals from Springfield and throughout Illinois to reverse course. Governor Yates, who three months earlier publicly shamed the president into freeing and arming

¹¹⁵ Tap, “Race, Rhetoric, and Emancipation,” 114.

¹¹⁶ Pratt, “The Repudiation of Lincoln’s War Policy in 1862,” 136.

¹¹⁷ Letter from John M. Scott to William W. Orme, October 3, 1862, Orme Collection, ALPLM.

¹¹⁸ *Daily Illinois State Register*, September 29, 1862; Smith, *No Party Now*, 55.

former slaves, now worried what impact these refugees might have on his party's hopes of winning enough seats.¹¹⁹ David Davis also wrote Lincoln expressing his concern "that the spreading of negroes from Cairo, through the Central portion of Illinois, will work great harm in the coming election," especially with "the large number of Republican voters who have gone to the war ... and of the Negroes coming into the state."¹²⁰ Even Swett felt forced to comment on the arrival of African-Americans into the area in late October, publicly stating, "I am now and always have been opposed to their introduction amongst us."¹²¹ While no Republican candidate dared call for a retraction of the Proclamation during the campaign, some questioned its hazardous timing (combined with Stanton's order) to the party's prospects.

Regardless of whether the White House kept or repealed the refugee order, Republicans in the region were placed in a less than enviable position. Stanton eventually revoked his order after concerns mounted over the measure's impact on the midterm elections, but he merely delayed it until after the election. This in fact encouraged Democratic attacks throughout the state, and Lanphier accused Swett and Republicans of political expediency. While John T. Stuart was uncomfortable using his campaign platform to constantly rail against Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation, Lanphier had no such qualms and in his columns charged Republicans of being disingenuous for claiming an end to the order when in fact it was only postponed. The campaign's focus was simple, according to Lanphier: "Shall the Constitution be maintained? Shall Illinois be Africanized?"¹²² Lanphier reminded readers of their options before the polls opened the following day: "Working men of Springfield, if you would not have the

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 56.

¹²⁰ David Davis to Abraham Lincoln, October 14, 1862, Lincoln Collection, LOC; *ibid*.

¹²¹ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, October 25, 1862.

¹²² *Daily Illinois State Register*, October 25, 1862; Tap, "Race, Rhetoric, and Emancipation," 117.

town filled with these worthless negroes, sent here to degrade and reduce the wages of white labor, vote against the abolition candidates.”¹²³

This tactic worked, as it had one year earlier. “The Home of Lincoln Condemns the Proclamation,” blared the *Register*’s headline the morning after the election. “Hail, old Sangamon, and the Illinois capital, the home of Lincoln. She has passed a fiery ordeal, but comes out brighter and stronger by the trial.” In one of the state’s most anticipated races Springfield voters elected Stuart by a commanding 416 vote majority, 1,294 ballots to Swett’s 878. This was the most lopsided outcome for a major political contest during the war in town. For comparison, Democrats won every other race that election by an average of 200 votes, the second largest margin was a 225 difference for city sheriff. Stuart won the district with 12,808 votes over 11,443 cast for Swett.¹²⁴ No wonder Democrats exuded confidence in the election’s wake. Republican supporter Mercy Conkling explained, “The sympathizers with the rebellion are wonderfully bold, and talk loud about compromise, etc. so that such a discourse now creates more feeling than it would have done before the election.”¹²⁵ Lincoln received the news poorly, Springfield minister N. W. Miner recalled after his White House visit shortly after the results became known. “[T]he President was very much cast down at the State of things,” Miner said, but to another confidante Lincoln admitted his expectation “that Stuart . . . wd get more votes than any other person in Sangamon.”¹²⁶

As the party suffering defeat Springfield Republicans attempted to explain what went wrong. The outcome surprised banker Roswell Goodell who, like others in the party, predicted

¹²³ Quinn, "Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War," 38.

¹²⁴ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, November 5, 1862; *Daily Illinois State Register*, November 8, 1862.

¹²⁵ Mercy Conkling to Clinton Conkling, November 27, 1862, Conkling Family Collection, ALPLM.

¹²⁶ Rev. N. W. Miner, “Personal Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln,” July 10, 1882, Miner Collection, ALPLM; David Davis to Leonard Swett, November 26, 1862, in Pratt, *Concerning Mr. Lincoln*, 94-95.

the election “was all going Republican” based on support from War Democrats. “[I]f Lightning had struck the State House with” these prognosticators inside, Goodell said, “it would not have shocked them more than the election returns.” Alternatively, others pinned Republicans woes on so many Democratic appointments in the Army. One person in town said that the lack of positive news from the war had “a depressing effect upon everybody,” while another blamed the spike in political arrests that prohibited Democrats from publicly stating their preferred candidates “for fear of getting into Ft Warren or some other uncomfortable place.” As a result, on Election Day they “went up and silently deposited their votes.”¹²⁷

One of the more popular explanations Republicans offered was denying soldiers the opportunity to vote in the election, thus preventing the party’s almost assured victory. A soldier with the 33rd Illinois Infantry stationed at Camp Butler told his niece back in Peoria, “Illinois has gone for ‘secesh’, I hear. No wonder.... The truth seems to be that the loyal men have ‘gone to war’.”¹²⁸ For historical perspective, the *Journal* pointed out that the states that contributed the most troops during the War of 1812 also saw its majority parties lose seats. Yet “when the soldiers returned to their homes,” the editor continued, “their ballots crushed out the party that had thane advantage of their absence to win party victories and embarrass the administration.”¹²⁹

Not all subscribed to this theory, however, especially in light of the recent developments pertaining to emancipation and the migration of former slaves into Illinois. Swett’s closest friend Judge David Davis calculated that the combination “of the negroes, coming into the State” coupled with “the large number of Republican voters, who have gone to the war under that last

¹²⁷ Roswell Eaton Goodell to Isaac Curran, November 28, 1862, Goodell Collection, ALPLM; Tap, "Race, Rhetoric, and Emancipation," 121; "An Illinois Farmer during the Civil War," 102.

¹²⁸ Dunk Ingraham to Alice, November 16, 1862, Ingraham Family Collection, ALPLM.

¹²⁹ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, November 17, 1862.

call” proved doubly harmful for Republican candidates.¹³⁰ Others understood that many soldiers held the same racial anxieties as of those back home.¹³¹ The Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation divided soldier opinion heading into the fall season, providing mixed reports from party leaders in the field serving in high positions. William W. Orme, serving with the 94th Illinois in Missouri, confided to Leonard Swett, “The President’s proclamation meets with universal commendation among the soldiers.... They are for confiscation, emancipation & everything else. You cannot be too ultra for the soldiers.”¹³² On the other hand, Illinois Brigadier General Richard Oglesby wrote that the majority of soldiers “cared nothing about the negro, or party politics—They wished to put down the rebellion, restore the Union, and restore the authority of the constitution and laws and let all other questions alone.”¹³³ John Lindsey Harris, who lived just outside Springfield yet was stationed with his regiment in Tennessee during the midterm election, admitted “being as ultry in defending the administration and denouncing everything opposing it,” but his captain “rejoiced considerably over the success of [the] democratic party at the last election.”¹³⁴

Preventing soldiers from casting ballots was not the reason Springfield voters elected Stuart over Swett. Stuart handily won his seat because he was well-liked in the community and the majority of its white inhabitants had little appetite witnessing emancipated slaves take up residency in their city. “Choose between your life-long neighbor and friend” Stuart, the *Register*

¹³⁰ David Davis to Abraham Lincoln, October 14, 1862, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

¹³¹ For example, see Allardice, “Illinois is Rotten With Traitors!”, 109-111; and Tap, “Race, Rhetoric, and Emancipation,” 121.

¹³² William W. Orme to Leonard Swett, October 1, 1862, Orme Collection, ALPLM.

¹³³ Plummer, *Lincoln's Rail-Splitter*, 83.

¹³⁴ John Lindsey Harris to “Father,” November 24, 1862, John Lindsey Harris Collection, ALPLM.

reminded its readers, or “the petti-fogging partisan” Swett.¹³⁵ And while Stuart was a notoriously poor campaigner going back to his politically active years as a Whig – a point Democrats used against him at the time – Swett was not much better.¹³⁶ As a result, Swett faced larger obstacles in his bid to defeat Stuart in Illinois’s capital. But the contest was not close, and Swett had to live with the realization that he lost to a man who had never been part of the Democratic establishment before his decision to run and had finished a distant third in 1860 as a Constitutional Union candidate for governor. By 1862, however, Stuart won his seat to Congress offering a vision of the war that appealed to the majority of conservative local attitudes: a return to the antebellum status quo, commonly described as “the Constitution as it is; the Union as it was.”

That meant no emancipation, and the main issue still plaguing area Republicans exposed them for the second election cycle in a row. His political career essentially over with the loss, Swett expressed his belief that he and his fellow Republican candidates campaigned under “the most adverse circumstances” with emancipation and “the immigration of negroes to the state.” He concluded that “the Proclamation was the most effective weapon used by the Democrats to prove that the Republicans were recient to all their pledges [in] 1860 not to interfere with slavery in the States.” These developments produced “an avalanche which no party could stand.”¹³⁷ The Proclamation had “revived old party issues,” Orville H. Browning passed along to Lincoln, noting that the measure had been “disastrous to us.” Had it not been issued, Democrats would have remained unable to rally as a party since “they had no issue without taking ground

¹³⁵ *Daily Illinois State Register*, November 3, 1862.

¹³⁶ Winkle, *The Young Eagle*, 164.

¹³⁷ Leonard Swett to Orme, November 24, 1862, Orme Collection, ALPLM; Richard P. L. Baber to Abraham Lincoln, November 22, 1862, Lincoln Collection, LOC; Donald, *Lincoln*, 366. For explanations that focused on military setbacks, see Jesse K. Dubois to Abraham Lincoln, October 6, 1862, Lincoln Collection, LOC and William W. Orme to Leonard Swett, October 1, 1862, Orme Collection, ALPLM.

against the war, and upon that we would annihilate them.” Even the Democratic *Register* cited emancipation as the source for its party’s strong showing at the polls one day after the election.¹³⁸

Conclusion

After the election Republicans were no closer to resolving their internal differences as they were beforehand. In fact, Democrats began wondering if Lincoln would heed the people’s “voice and turn back & withdraw the proclamation which, an immense majority of the people of the loyal states vote to be not only unconstitutional, but unwise, impolitic, and fruitful only of ruin to the country’s best interests?”¹³⁹ The *Journal* scoffed at this suggestion, but that did little to heal its party’s internal divide. In the Illinois capital, however, there were bigger concerns for Republicans heading into the New Year with a Democratic majority in both houses of the State Legislature eager to influence its political leverage in the face of Civil War. Illinois was on the precipice, and its fate would be decided in the halls of the State House and on the streets of Springfield.

¹³⁸ Smith, *No Party Now*, 57.

¹³⁹ *Daily Illinois State Register*, November 8, 1862.

CHAPTER FOUR:
LOYALTY TESTED, LOYALTY DEBATED:
LINCOLN'S HOME ON THE PRECIPICE, JANUARY-JUNE 1863

Charges of disloyalty were frequently hurled around Springfield over the course of the Civil War, as they were throughout the country during its deepest crisis. Before secession, Republicans and Democrats each claimed their side best represented absolute loyalty to the Union. Yet at no point was the definition of loyalty more hotly contested in the Illinois capital than during the first half of 1863. The reason for this was because Illinois Democrats, for the first time in the war, posed a serious challenge to Republican leadership. The party was riding a wave of momentum heading into the New Year with majorities in both the state houses having successfully campaigned on the unpopularity of the Emancipation Proclamation in November 1862. Many of its current members no longer shied away from identifying with the party that was regularly tied to disloyalty. They had grown tired of these accusations and they were now in a position to push back against them. Democrats in the State House and in town defended their party's platform and accused *Republicans* of disloyalty to the Constitution for waging an illegal war in order to subjugate the Southern states, take away their slaves, and turn the South into a free society against its will. These attacks resonated with a sizable portion of the town's population.

Republicans did not stand idly by while these indictments against them mounted. They maintained their definition of loyalty was the correct one, all the while trying to withstand whatever threats the incoming majority Democracy posed to the war and its fate. Carrying over from chapter three, this chapter argues that the issue of loyalty so consumed the city that everything revolved around it, even as its definition was constantly in flux. It also illustrates that at no other point was there more uncertainty in Springfield over the fate of the war than in those

early months of 1863. Anti-administration Democrats spent that period believing momentum was on their side, proudly staking their claim as the dominant party in the Home of Lincoln. And it all stemmed from events taking place in the State House beginning in January of that year.

The 1863 State Legislative Session

Springfield citizens opened 1863 with less optimism than usual. Anna Ridgely, the teenage daughter of a prominent Springfield banker and one of thirteen children, had little faith that the New Year would be better than the previous one. “I tremble sometime for the dark, uncertain future.... Oh, that this war might cease.”¹ Likewise, Duncan Ingraham, a soldier serving with the 33rd Illinois Infantry who was in Springfield recovering from an injury, worried about the Union’s military prospects in the face of recent setbacks. “Don’t we have awful luck subduing the rebels. Whipped at Fredericksburg, at Vicksburg, at Galveston & everywhere. What can be the matter?” Besides the status of the armies, Ingraham also saw how the wartime economy had hurt many local families financially, remarking, “Everybody is hoarding the specie & is distrustful of treasury notes.”² January 1863 opened with little of the hope that typically accompanied a new year.

The political atmosphere contributed mightily to this skepticism. As promised, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, granting freedom to all slaves held in enemy territory. Like others across the North who rejoiced in this momentous act, Lincoln said he “never, in my life, felt more certain that I was doing right, than I do in signing this paper.”³ Back in his hometown of Springfield, Illinois, the Republican newspaper hailed the

¹ Corneau, "A Girl in the Sixties," 421-422.

² Duncan Ingraham to Ned Ingraham, January 16, 25, 1863, Ingraham Family Collection, ALPLM.

³ Donald, *Lincoln*, 407.

move as an act of humanitarianism and predicted this action would ultimately serve as the Confederacy's death knell. "It is enough to know that the rebellion has received a staggering blow," the *Journal* editor proclaimed. The Democratic editor of the *Register* thought otherwise, asserting that, "If Mr. Lincoln will trample on the constitution the people will not stand by him. They will become disheartened in fighting the battles of the country, and they will utterly withdraw from him the affection and respect which every ruler should, by upright conduct, command." These were merely the first salvos from the rival Springfield presses that year, and they set the tone for an extremely bitter political environment that would only intensify once the 1863 legislative session opened on January 5. Other public statements and reactions would follow in the days and weeks to come, resulting in what would be the most politically contentious period in Springfield during the war.⁴

But the city was not totally unique in this regard. The Northern home front witnessed fiery debates over the direction of the war throughout 1863. Across the state, especially in Southern Illinois, antiwar reactions erupted throughout the year, some even resulting in violent outbreaks. As the Illinois capital and military headquarters, no one could blame Springfield residents who might be concerned that their hometown's strategic importance placed them at a similar risk. Yet despite – or perhaps due to – its political and military importance, Springfield largely avoided the riots or violence suffered in other parts of the state. The city was not an actual political battleground, but rather a spot where supporters and detractors of the Lincoln administration freely argued their views in the public sphere. Each side claimed their better

⁴ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, January 3, 1863; *Daily Illinois State Register*, January 2, 1863; Multiple studies on the North maintain that the 1864 presidential election was the most politically volatile point of the Civil War, and Springfield witnessed its share of acrimony as evidenced in chapter four. But that event was confined to fighting between local Democrats and Republicans, whereas the 1863 State Legislature was a rancorous statewide affair whose battles took place in the heart of Springfield, and the city was subject to the partisan backlash emanating throughout the halls of the Illinois State House.

represented the ideals of the Union, and therefore what it meant to be truly “loyal” during this national crisis. This political quarrelling overwhelmed Lincoln’s hometown in 1863 and seeped into the social fabric of everyday Springfield. The debates over the direction of the war – and who was better fit to lead – became the city’s wartime legacy.

The opening of the new legislative session only exacerbated this clash. Locals took an interest in the actions of the legislature because of the State House’s centrality and importance to the city. This year would be no different with Democrats now in control of both houses of the Illinois Congress, believing they had a mandate from voters in the last election to thwart the pro-war and pro-abolitionist agendas of the Republican governor. The Emancipation Proclamation was easily the controversial issue splitting the two parties, and Democrats provided few signs that they intended to lay off their criticisms of the measure, especially since that tactic had worked so effectively during the recent campaign. Prior to the session’s formal opening, leaders and members of each party followed the standard practice of gathering in the days beforehand in order to identify their respective faction’s platform heading into the legislature. Members of the state’s Democratic caucus held a public meeting at the Capitol building one evening where they expressed their growing agitation with the direction of the war. They mostly rehashed their grievances that the Emancipation Proclamation was unconstitutional, as was Lincoln’s issuing it as an executive order. Leading party members created a set of resolutions accusing the Lincoln administration of diverting resources and attention away from the war and converting it “into a crusade for the sudden, unconditional and violent liberation of three millions of negro slaves.” Several denounced the Proclamation because of the likely “servile insurrection” it would provoke among the South’s nearly four million slaves, thereby introducing a primitive-style of

combat to the conflict with “the inhumanity and diabolism of which are without example in civilized warfare.”⁵

Democrats maintained these attacks once the session opened. Prominent speakers waited their turn delivering anti-Lincoln harangues that included calls ranging from an immediate cessation of the war; to a continuation of the fighting but without emancipation; to efforts at persuading Southern states to return to the Union with their demands granted. Illinois Democrats split over the best way to end the war but shared disdain for any measure that abolished slavery. On the first day of the session, Richard T. Merrick of Chicago addressed a crowd and threatened a Northwestern secession movement from New England if Lincoln failed to retract his Proclamation. Another Chicago Democrat suggested “marching an army to Washington and hurling the officers of the present Administration from their positions!”⁶ The next day’s edition of the anti-administration *Illinois State Register* contained the following headlines: “Lincoln’s Proclamation Repudiated!” “Immense Popular Demonstration at Lincoln’s Home.”⁷

Republicans and their supporters prepared for this type of reaction since their defeat at the polls in November. Many spent the winter months nervously awaiting the opening of the legislature with the newly-elected Democratic majority set to preside over the General Assembly. For instance, James and Mercy Conkling, friends of the Lincoln family, expressed the apprehension that many Republican supporters in town shared. Mercy Conkling described the “disgracefull” scene she witnessed of Democrats speaking “in favor of seceding from the New England States” and the suggested plot of hurling “Mr Lincoln from the presidential chair, and inaugurating civil war north.” James Conkling had anticipated this “abundance of growling at the

⁵ Angle, *Here I Have Lived*, 274-275.

⁶ Ibid, 275; Quinn, "Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War," 41.

⁷ *Daily Illinois State Register*, January 6, 1863.

Administration & treason” on the last day of 1862, and he later believed the Democratic leadership in the House targeted him after that body refused to pass a bill related to Conkling’s private business. According to his wife, the “legislature have set themselves diligently to work to destroy everything in their power, having the slightest republican bearing.”⁸

Supporters of the war therefore countered with their own rallies. Republicans and their sympathizers, still identifying as members of the “Union Party,” staged their own demonstration in the days following the Democratic gathering. On January 9, a procession of “loyal citizens” marched to the Capitol and filled the galleries where they listened to speeches supporting Lincoln, Governor Richard Yates, and the war. Richard Oglesby, a state senator from Decatur who gave up his seat when he enlisted in the 8th Illinois Infantry, was the featured speaker that evening. Back in Illinois after resigning his commission from being shot in the lungs at the Battle of Corinth, Oglesby now turned his attention to rallying support on the home front. He condemned Northerners who posed obstacles to the Union’s effort in defeating the Confederate armies. He reprimanded “semi-traitors” who were “willing to throw anything in the way of the success of the Administration and the army.” And “if there are such skulking about Springfield they are deceived in their vocation when they think they are leading the people away from the support of the war.” A roar of cheers welcomed his warning to defectors: “You will sink yourselves to a damnation so deep as to be eternally beyond the reach of recovery.”

Oglesby then turned to address those still wary of the wartime benefits from the Emancipation Proclamation. His lungs admittedly taxing him by this point of his speech, the injured statesman and soldier mustered enough energy to defend the measure. Initially, Oglesby claimed, “I never would have touched their slaves had they remained loyal to the Union and the

⁸ Mercy Conkling to Clinton Conkling, January 11, 19, 1863; James C. Conkling to Clinton Conkling, December 31, 1862, Conkling Family Collection, ALPLM.

constitution.” Oglesby therefore sympathized with those who supported every other decision Lincoln had made, “even though he does not act in accordance with your ideas” on abolition. But that was in the past. Now, he said, “This proclamation is a great thing, perhaps the greatest thing that has occurred in this century. It is too big for us to realize. When we fully comprehend what it is we shall like it better than we do now.”⁹ Six days later, leading Republicans held another rally and adopted resolutions reaffirming their faith in Lincoln’s efforts to quell the rebellion, including one that distinctly referenced the Emancipation Proclamation. Out of necessity, the war now “demanded of the President of the United States the issuing of his proclamation of freedom to the slaves in the rebellious States,” the Republican resolution read, “and we pledge ourselves to sustain him in the same.”¹⁰

The one individual in Springfield who found this Republican pushback most reassuring was Illinois Governor Richard Yates. Yates nervously awaited the opening of the new legislative session, agonizing over what intentions the incoming Democratic majority had once the session opened. He worried that some would ally with antiwar conspirators and attempt to oust him from office and incite an insurrection in the capital city. After accomplishing this task, Yates fretted, Copperheads and other opponents would gain control of the state’s political machinations and pull Illinois out of the war and, possibly, the Union.¹¹ Yet instead of trying to find common ground with his political rivals, Yates delivered a lengthy opening address to the legislature that year with a stern and uncompromising tone. He was unwilling to soften his stance on issues such as emancipation, which he strongly supported, even though it might frustrate and embolden

⁹ “Speech of General Richard J. Oglesby, Delivered at the Union Meeting Held in the Hall of Representatives at Springfield, Illinois, on Friday evening January 9, 1863,” Richard Oglesby Collection, ALPLM.

¹⁰ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, January 16, 1863.

¹¹ See Nortrup, “Yates, the Prorogued Legislature, and the Constitutional Convention,” 13, 22-24.

Democrats in the House and Senate. Not only was this a necessary measure at ending the war, Yates charged, but it also lined up with the will of a higher deity. “In the name of justice, whose high tribunals it has corrupted . . . in the name of God himself, I demand the utter and entire demolition of this Heaven-cursed wrong of human bondage.”¹²

Yet behind this resolute tone was an individual who had serious doubts about Illinois’s future and its involvement in the war. Union demonstrations in the early weeks of the legislative session contented Yates, but he wondered if this “may be the calm which pervades the storm.” As the session endured, Yates sought advice and assistance from other Republican leaders, particularly from Indiana’s Republican Governor Oliver P. Morton who faced a similar dilemma in his own state. Yates informed Morton two weeks after the session convened: “The legislature here is a wild, rampant, revolutionary body, will attempt to legislate all power out of my hands. What is best to be done in such a case?” “I feel sure that there is concert between the traitors of your and our state,” Yates continued, and he wondered if Morton had “made any preparations for an emergency.” By the end of January, Yates so feared any opposition that he insisted Lincoln send “at least 4 Regiments of well armed men” to stand guard and prevent the state from being overtaken by disloyal conspirators. Lincoln refused, and this left the already paranoid Yates feeling isolated and forced to deal with this threat alone.¹³

Historians still debate the legitimacy of Yates’s concerns and reactions, given that the State House – unlike other parts of Illinois or the Old Northwest – avoided the violent outbreaks

¹² “Message of His Excellency, Richard Yates, Governor of Illinois, to the General Assembly, January 5, 1863” (Springfield: Baker & Phillips, Printers, 1863), 45.

¹³ Richard Yates to Governor Oliver P. Morton, January 19, 1863, Yates Collection, ALPLM; Richard Yates to Abraham Lincoln, January 30, 1863, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

and riots he had anticipated.¹⁴ They do agree that Democrats posed a serious challenge to his governorship. And this was more than simply preventing Yates from proposing any meaningful legislation to a contrarian State Assembly; Yates feared that the Democratic congress would attempt to revoke his wartime powers as Illinois's commander-in-chief, which turned out to be a genuine concern. Democrats at first attacked parts of the Republican-led war, and some focused all of their energies on finding ways to end it. They denounced Republicans who abused the war for the rise of arbitrary arrests, the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus, and restrictions on free speech. They reserved most of their ire for the Emancipation Proclamation, an act they repeatedly maintained was unconstitutional and unrelated to the original intent of the war. They even recommended that Yates be censured after he "timidly allowed the constitution of the State to be defied and trampled upon by the President of the United States."¹⁵

Moving beyond statements of disapproval, Democrats proposed legislation intended to wrest control from the governor and transfer his executive powers to the two houses. These included all war-related finances controlled by the governor, raising and organizing the state's

¹⁴ Historian Frank Klement maintained that Yates and fellow Republicans acted recklessly and exaggerated the strength of secret societies such as the Knights of the Golden Circle in order to score at the ballot box. "In fact," Klement concluded in his 1955 study, "the subversive society bogey-man was a political apparition intended solely to aid Republicans in defeating Democrats at the polls." See Klement, "Copperhead Secret Societies." Quotation found on page 180. Jack Nortrup found blame evenly distributed between Yates and the Democratic Legislature, maintaining, "it would be difficult to determine which side was more recalcitrant and foolish in its attitude – the Governor or the constituent assembly." See Jack Nortrup, "Yates, the Prorogued Legislature, and the Constitutional Convention," *ibid.* 62, no. 1 (1969): 34. In recent years, historians have begun to reevaluate Yates's actions. Thomas Bahde found parts of Klement's criticisms sound, but that the original Copperhead scholar had pushed too far: "Republican governors like Richard Yates certainly exaggerated the threat of disunion to serve political purposes, but ... [Klement's] thesis overlooks the very real perception among many ordinary Midwesterners that civil war with the region and invasion by Rebel forces were distinct possibilities." See Thomas Bahde, "'Our Cause Is a Common One': Home Guards, Union Leagues, and Republican Citizenship in Illinois, 1861-1863," *Civil War History* LVI, no. 1 (2010): 74. Lastly, Stephen E. Towne has also pushed back against Klement's enduring thesis: "As scholars continue to study and learn about Northern life during the Civil War, it becomes increasingly clear that the Old Northwest was also the scene of its own violent civil war, a battlefield of clashing ideologies about the future of the country." See Stephen E. Towne, "Fear and Loathing in Indiana," *The New York Times: Opinionator*, February 22, 2013.

¹⁵ Nortrup, "Yates, the Prorogued Legislature, and the Constitutional Convention," 24-29. Quotation found on page 26.

volunteer regiments, and appointing officers. They even attempted – but failed – to create a board of commissioners in charge with overseeing all state-related military affairs, thus removing whatever military powers Yates still retained after all that.¹⁶ The most controversial move came in February when Democrats in the Illinois House of Representatives passed a bill pushing for an immediate end to the war. Referred to as the Peace Resolutions, the measure listed grievances over “the flagrant and monstrous usurpations of the Administration,” with considerable blame heaped on the Emancipation Proclamation. They resolved “That peace, fraternal relations, and political fellowship should be restored among the States,” and “that the best interests of all and the welfare of mankind require that this should be done in the most speedy and most effective manner.” Therefore, Illinois Democrats in the House proposed an armistice with the Confederate government and the two warring sides should begin arrangements for a peace conference “at the earliest practical period” in order to find an end to the conflict so “that the States may hereafter live together in harmony.”¹⁷

Senate Republicans’ filibuster prevented passage of this bill, but the episode highlights the difficult balancing act Democrats faced. Members opened themselves up to antiwar charges by criticizing the Emancipation Proclamation. Hopefully made clear from chapter three, however, Democrats from the Springfield region remained largely supportive of the war while condemning abolition. But Democrats from other parts of Illinois as well as regions across the North opposed the war *and* emancipation, and they were called Copperheads. Republicans regularly conflated the two, oftentimes intentionally, and someone identifying as a Democrat was associated with being a Copperhead unless they had publicly exclaimed their support for the war *and* the Emancipation Proclamation. But this connection only hurt Democrats when good news

¹⁶ Ibid, 26.

¹⁷ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, February 5, 1863.

from the battlefield filled newspaper headlines, a rare occurrence in the early months of 1863. It was also too early for a lot of Northerners to appreciate the strategic, and eventually moral, importance of emancipation. Little wonder then that, with Democrats benefitting from the current political climate, Yates was anxious over potentially losing his executive powers at a time when he believed nefarious forces threatened the state during this most trying time.

Arguments on the floors of the State House quickly morphed into debates over loyalty and treason. Crowds packed the balconies daily as members of each party attempted to out-argue their opponents. Many in the building were Springfield spectators who witnessed firsthand the breakdown of their state government. One observer noted, “no one not present at the time can imagine the bitterness, even ferocity of temper, with which these resolutions were discussed.” Republicans hastily slammed the Democratic peace proposal. One found “treason in every line and word, and if possible, in every punctuation mark” of the bill. “[N]o man has a right to be a traitor,” was the official Republican response to the Peace Resolutions, “no man has a right to aid and abet the enemies of his country.” Democrats fired back, declaring those claims were unfounded. One legislator demanded that Republicans explicitly define traitorous activity. “It was time that we knew what treason was.... I denounce the practice of denouncing everything with which we do not agree as treason.... I protest against denouncing men as traitors, merely for opposing the abolition measures of this administration.” Though they bitterly disagreed with the Lincoln administration, Democrats claimed they were “equally hostile to the Southern rebellion.” Another Democrat attempted to clarify his party’s platform. “As true as there is a God in heaven I do not desire to do anything that is not for the best interest of my people and the people of the

United States,” he explained. “Let the war return to its original purpose, and I am in favor of using all the men, money and means we can commend for such a purpose.”¹⁸

This tension lasted the entire session, which Democrats recessed early on February 14. The party’s leaders followed through with their promise to create a board of six commissioners to investigate the prospects of a peace settlement, and they set a date in early June to reconvene both houses after the board had an opportunity to conclude its mission. Republicans continued assailing their Democratic colleagues up to the point of adjourning. On the session’s last day before the recess, Isaac M. Funk, a Republican farmer from McClean County, stood up to address the chamber. Apparently making his first public speech to a legislative body after serving multiple terms, the state senator “could sit no longer” and listen to accusations that Republicans had mishandled every facet of the war. “My heart, that bleeds for the widows and the orphans at home, would not let me.” Funk condemned Democratic obstructionists because their antiwar rhetoric and reckless behavior were “killing my neighbors’ boys now fighting in the field.” Speaking with force and animation, Funk recommended that these traitors be hanged, though he never mentioned any by name. He even offered a proposition to any opponent who had grown tired of trying to settle these differences through debate or the legislature’s parliamentary system. “Let them come on now right here. I am sixty-five years old, and I have made up my mind to risk my life right here, on this floor, for my country.”¹⁹ Pro-war newspapers across the North reprinted all or parts of Funk’s speech, and the senator received letters of gratitude from people across the country thanking him for courageously saying what few else could.

¹⁸ Quinn, "Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War," 44; Nortrup, "Yates, the Prorogued Legislature, and the Constitutional Convention," 24.

¹⁹ "Scene in the Illinois Legislature. Speech of a Brave Old Patriot," *The Loyalist's Ammunition*, (Philadelphia 1863), 4-5.

The Soldiers' Voice

Funk's discourse was not the only legislative affair to reach an audience beyond those in the State House and around Springfield. Illinois soldiers across the South followed the 1863 state legislature with keen interest. With the session taking place in January and February, these volunteers spent the winter months inside tents and log huts where they had ample time to read and discuss political affairs. Troops received newspapers and letters with updates on the latest information from home, and they grew anxious and sad during those stretches when mail call was irregular. Balzer Grebe, a second lieutenant in the 114th Illinois Infantry and a resident of Springfield, wrote "the hardest blow to me [was] that our letters were kept from us."²⁰ And in the early months of 1863, they craved news coming out of the Illinois State House.

These soldiers initially complained about the partisan bickering between the two sides taking place in the legislature. One group of soldiers stationed in Tennessee, dubbing themselves "The Army of Illinois," wrote a joint letter requesting that political leaders and others back home stand united against the Confederacy. "We call upon all who love their country, to rise above all personal or party ties." They demanded their voices be heard on questions related to the fate of the Union. "Though not voters, for the reason that we cannot attend the polls, we still retain the right of voting, and our voice in the settlement of this great question, is entitled to some consideration."²¹ Illinois volunteers stationed in Corinth, Mississippi, including men from Springfield and Sangamon County, condemned "the bitter partisan spirit that is becoming

²⁰ Balzer Grebe, from *The Autobiography and Civil War Diary*, Balzer Grebe, 2nd Lieutenant, 14th Illinois Regiment, United States Infantry, Balzer Grebe Collection, ALPLM.

²¹ "The Army of Illinois" to the Editors of the Illinois State Journal, *Daily Illinois State Journal*, February 19, 1863.

dangerously vindictive and malicious in our state.” These soldiers collectively encouraged their neighbors and friends “to lay aside all petty jealousies and party animosities.”²²

But reading further, these calls against political brinksmanship contained distinct pro-war and pro-Republican undertones. Later in its letter, “The Army of Illinois” slammed the Peace Resolutions issued by the Democratic majority in the State Capitol. These men denounced any and all language that touched on issues of compromise, armistice, or truce with the enemy. “[W]e can and will conquer the traitors of the South, unless our hands are stayed by our Governments, State and National.... All we ask of you, patriots, is to disarm the traitors in our rear,” including those who might hold elected office. Similarly, those troops in Mississippi who requested that acquaintances back home cast aside their political differences likewise urged them to support ongoing Republican efforts at suppressing the Confederacy. But they went even further. “Should the loathsome treason of the madmen who are trying to wrest from [Governor Richard Yates] a portion of his just authority render it necessary in his opinion for us to return and crush out Treason there,” one resolution read, “we will promptly obey a proper order so to do.” Similar threats toward Copperheads and Democratic traitors back in Illinois were not restricted to a few soldiers or select units scattered across the South. Entire regiments stationed throughout the region, including these two examples, formed makeshift committees and produced resolutions themselves denouncing the political obstruction in Springfield. They sent duplicates to President Lincoln, Yates, and the editors of the Republican-leaning *Journal* for publication.²³

²² “Patriotic Resolutions of the Officers & Men of Illinois Regiments Corinth, Miss.,” January 30, 1863, Yates Collection, ALPLM.

²³ *Ibid.* Similar resolutions appear in the ALPLM’s Lincoln Collection and the *Daily Illinois State Journal*.

Individual soldiers, on the other hand, often vented their frustration in letters to family and friends. These letters included similar threats toward anyone who posed obstacles in the Union Army's ability to execute its mission. If he was able, a volunteer in the 14th Illinois Infantry "would like to be at home particularly now while the copperheads are so numerous and so devilish, I look on that class of humanity now as being the lowest of all creation, they are really secessionists and too cowardly to defend their principles." Another soldier serving in Tennessee expressed his opinion that Union troops had more respect for the enemy in front of them than the one in their rear. "The Copperheads had better be saying their prayers for the feeling in the army I believe is more bitter against them, than it is against the men in the southern army, who come out and fight us openly, like brave men." "I would rather kill one of them, than twenty of these southern fellows," said another. When G. M. Mitchell received news that the Democratically controlled government in Springfield "proposed[d] to Legislate Illinois out of the Union," he suggested that these lawmakers "speak for their Winding Sheets & have their Coffins made." The only regret that men of the 82nd Illinois Infantry had was that they were "no longer at Camp Butler, to have an opportunity of liberating the halls of our capitol, from this detestable scum."²⁴ These volunteers believed that their absence from the state had given peace Democrats too much free reign in Springfield, and their letters contained threats to remedy that imbalance.

Officers and enlisted men from multiple Illinois regiments tried to influence public opinion in their resolutions or letters, reminding those back home of the sacrifices they endured while fighting on behalf of the nation. These volunteers believed they had proven their loyalty to

²⁴ John L. Harris to Susan, April 3, 1863, John L. Harris Collection; R. B. Latham to Wife, May 11, 1863, R. B. Latham Collection; G. M. Mitchell to Ozias M. Hatch, April 14, 1863, Ozias M. Hatch Collection, ALPLM; Mark E. Neely, *The Union Divided: Party Conflict in the Civil War North* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002), 43. Also noteworthy, despite few soldiers mentioning it in their letters, was news that Illinois's Democratic majority rejected measures to give Illinois troops a pay raise and opportunities to vote while away from home. See Nortrup, "Yates, the Prorogued Legislature, and the Constitutional Convention," 26.

the Union with their military service, and they insisted that Northern civilians respect that contribution and move beyond scoring political points. Yet these soldiers also needed validation that their efforts were worthwhile and that Illinoisans endorsed their actions. “There is nothing which elevates the soldier so much as the conscious feeling that his friends at home and the public sentiment of the country supports and applauds him for his vocation and for his bold daring,” Oglesby professed in his January State House address. “The soldier is very sensitive to the opinions of those he leaves behind him.”²⁵ Therefore, when Democratic members in the Illinois Congress spoke openly against the war and proposed legislation that many veterans deemed offensive because it contrasted with their mission, the men in the field grew increasingly hostile with that caucus back home. One volunteer stationed in Tennessee believed Democrats in Illinois posed a greater threat to Northern troops in the field than Confederate forces: “Ten thousand soldiers in the Southern army could not have hurt us as much as the Springfield resolutions have and will.”²⁶

The message Illinois soldiers wanted to convey was clear: the Northern people might quarrel over the direction of the war, but the men fighting it had no such misgivings. This prompted troops to question the devotion of those on the home front. “If the people in Illinois could see where an army had been awhile,” John Lindsay wrote from Vicksburg, “they would be a little more loyal.” Daniel G. Kalb, a soldier from Springfield serving in the 114th Illinois, reassured those back home of his unit’s tireless devotion to the Union cause. “The fact is, with

²⁵ “Speech of General Richard J. Oglesby, Delivered at the Union Meeting Held in the Hall of Representatives at Springfield, Illinois, on Friday evening January 9, 1863,” Richard Oglesby Collection, ALPLM. In his study of Civil War soldiers, James M. McPherson noted, “without a firm base of support in the homes and communities from which these citizen soldiers came, their morale would have crumbled.” James McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 131. Additionally, for a more detailed examination of veteran resentment toward Peace Democrats, see also 140-47.

²⁶ R. B. Latham to Wife, January 22, 1863, R. B. Latham Collection, ALPLM.

few exceptions, there are few regiments whose officers and men have evinced a greater share of patriotism, and more steady adherence to the cause they have espoused, than have those of Lincoln's Home Regiment."²⁷ Sometimes this included their support of the Emancipation Proclamation, though this did not always equate to favoring equal treatment for African Americans. Troops from the Prairie State, like others from across the North, were just as likely to express anti-black sentiments while applauding the elimination of slavery. But this mood began to change, first in the ranks and then slowly across the Northern home front, discussed at length in chapter five.

The Interlude: What Makes One Loyal?

Back in Springfield, the political friction from those first months of 1863 lingered after the two houses recessed and lawmakers returned home. The intense partisan climate in the city – that normally subsided after a typical session adjourned – persisted this year with the General Assembly set to reconvene in June. During that interlude, from mid-February to June, Springfield residents witnessed and contributed to the ongoing debates over loyalty that state political leaders and others initiated during the legislature; everything from municipal elections to secret societies, from criminal cases to the local parishes, even political patronage became a contest over which segments of society demonstrated true allegiance to the Union.

Not surprisingly, the two town newspapers led this charge. The Republican *Journal* deemed a person loyal if he or she willingly set aside party identifications in the contest to uphold the Union. It regularly used the Democratic Party's late-standard bearer as a worthy example. "There was a time when the *State Register* at least professed to be loyal – when it

²⁷ John L. Lindsay to Nancy, February 20, 1863, J. Lindsay Collection, ALPLM; *Daily Illinois State Journal*, March 12, 1863.

strove to rise to the patriotism inculcated by Senator Douglas.”²⁸ The Democratic *Register*, on the other hand, mocked their opponents’ qualifications distinguishing a loyal from a disloyal person. A loyal individual, the *Register* lampooned, was someone who publicly favored abolition and greed. Apparent signs included “Bellow[ing] about the negro at all hours and in all places;” “Pocket[ing] as much money and as many fat offices as you can;” “Gas[ing] about your patriotism vociferously, just like the old Pharisee did of his piety;” and “Justify[ing] everything the administration does, and swear that every man is a traitor who don’t agree with you – even if all his sons are in the army, while you are pocketing fat jobs.”²⁹ Similar back-and-forth reached beyond the walls of the two presses. When a young Jimmy called Charley’s father a “Copperhead and secessionist” on the streets of Springfield, Charley was quick to point out that Jimmy’s dad “was sure to be at home” at the first hint of battle.³⁰ Neither side held a monopoly on insulting suspected disloyalty.

Even that spring’s city council races turned into a test of loyalty for the Union. For the first time in five months, since the November 1862 midterm election, the parties in Springfield had a chance to gauge the political temperature of city voters. Oddly enough, at stake was whether residents viewed the actions of the state legislature favorably or not, and what this meant for their support of the war. Leading up to Election Day, each side ramped up attacks on the opposition while asserting their own credentials as the true party committed to the nation’s salvation. Republicans, again running under the “Union” platform, warned its members to “vote for no man whose position on the great issues of the day is not, beyond the reach of suspicion,

²⁸ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, March 25, 1863.

²⁹ *Daily Illinois State Register*, April 1, 1863.

³⁰ Mercy Conkling to Clinton Conkling, April 14, 1863, Conkling Family Collection, ALPLM.

earnestly loyal to his country.”³¹ Democrats, according to the *Register*, were “for the Union and for the constitution and all its guaranties.” Their supporters had a responsibility to “combat the opponents of either, whether they appear with arms in their hands” at voting polls, “or with lies upon their tongues and hypocrisy in their hearts.”³² Local concerns had obviously given way to the nation’s situation.

The two parties ended up splitting most races. With just under 2,000 votes cast in each race, no candidate won his respective seat by more than fifty-five votes. The Democratic candidate for Treasurer won his seat by nine votes. Democrats lost the race for mayor by thirteen votes – 961 to 948 – but the party won four of the seven seats to the city council. In addition to the mayoral seat, “Union” candidates won three of the five races for alderman. They split the four races for ward supervisors.³³ The election resolved little other than demonstrating Springfield’s deep political division, yet both sides claimed victory. The results demonstrated that Democratic momentum had waned since the party’s strong showing in the November 1862 congressional elections, however the *Register* still put a positive spin on the outcome, writing “Sangamon County shows great gains for our ticket.”³⁴ Alternatively, Republicans characterized the results as a referendum on the war. Despite their marginal victories, they equated their party’s political successes with a battlefield conquest. “The victory was complete,” Mercy Conkling described to her son. “The union cause is triumphant in our little place once again!”³⁵ Fireworks, canons, and marching bands played throughout the evening after the great “Union”

³¹ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, April 7, 1863.

³² *Daily Illinois State Register*, April 7, 1863.

³³ Results found in the *Daily Illinois State Journal*, April 11, 1863.

³⁴ *Daily Illinois State Register*, April 11, 1863.

³⁵ Mercy Conkling to Clinton Conkling, April 14, 1863, Conkling Family Collection, ALPLM.

victory. The election was a rebuke to Democratic mischief in the legislature, the Republican *Journal* proudly proclaimed, and “The home of Lincoln stands true to the Government.”³⁶

Secret Societies in Springfield: Rumored and Reality

Rumors of secret societies assembling in Springfield first appeared during the November 1861 election in which Democrats won a majority of seats to the State Constitutional Convention. From then until the opening of the convention in January 1862, Republican newspapers throughout the state reported widespread treasonous activity occurring across Illinois, including the capital. The most notorious culprit was the Knights of the Golden Circle. Originating in the 1850s, this group’s initial objective was ousting the Mexican government and converting the country into a U.S. colony where slavery could expand and flourish. Having failed that, the K.G.C. focused on uniting Southern sympathizers in the North during the Civil War. The group was particularly strong in the lower Midwestern and seceded states during the war, but historians struggle to estimate its numerical strength.³⁷

Joseph King Cummins Forrest, the Springfield correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune*, provoked Republican fears of K.G.C. activity throughout the Constitutional Convention. He claimed that “a majority of the members of the Convention” were associated with the group, including one participant apparently “known to have engaged in a treasonable correspondence with a Kentucky rebel.”³⁸ Leading Democrats and the majority of Republican convention members dismissed Forrest’s charges, even though his allegations put many outside the State House on alert. A special convention committee found little evidence to his charges, and Forrest

³⁶ Daily Illinois State Journal, April 15, 1863.

³⁷ Weber, *Copperheads*, 25.

³⁸ Klement, "Copperhead Secret Societies," 155; Dickerson, *The Illinois Constitutional Convention of 1862*, 50.

eventually conceded he had used questionable sources in his investigation. During his hearing, for example, Forrest at one point confessed “that a lady had asserted that one member held a commission from Jefferson Davis for a position in the rebel army.” Though many supporters of the administration branded the Democratically-controlled convention a disloyal body, no one could confirm an association with the K.G.C.³⁹

That did not slow Republican accusations of the K.G.C.’s or other clandestine antiwar groups’ existence or their supposed growing threat to the Northern war effort. Rumors of their traitorous actions waned after the convention completed its task and the proposed constitution failed, but they reemerged in the wake of the 1862-midterm elections. They returned with renewed vengeance during the 1863 legislature and lasted through the spring after the body recessed. In March, Governor Yates received word from an individual who “overheard a conversation” between two Copperheads about a potential coup in the capital city. Peace advocates there “had one thousand Minie rifles and was distributing a rifle and revolver to every man that would agree to use them.” Unless this action received immediate attention, the informer went on, “Dick Yates will be hung and Springfield laid in ashes.”⁴⁰ Similar letters appeared from other parts of the state whereby the slightest instance of irregular behavior could be linked to a vast conspiracy.

Republican newspaper editors justified verbal assaults on Democrats based on this type of hearsay. After Democrats adjourned in February, Springfield’s Republican *Journal* accused its Democratic rival the *Register* of being an organ of the K.G.C. The *Register*’s editor, Charles Lanphier, originally tried to refute each charge as they appeared, but his task became too arduous

³⁹ Klement, "Copperhead Secret Societies," 154-156.

⁴⁰ Wheeler Wright to Greenberry Wright, March 24, 1863, Yates Collection, ALPLM.

as Republicans simply increased their accusations.⁴¹ Consequently, Lanphier joined his *Journal* counterpart in censuring antiwar secret organizations supposedly overpowering the state, and he encouraged his Democratic readers to distance themselves from the like. For anyone considering joining these organizations, Lanphier advised, “be done with them, and at once. They can do no possible good to the cause you have at heart, and may, and we are sure will, be productive of much evil.”⁴²

In response to real and reported seditious Copperhead and K.G.C. activities, home front Republican sympathizers formed “Union Leagues” throughout the state. Also known as “Loyal Leagues,” these groups served a dual-purpose. They attracted individuals who, in lieu of enlisting in the army, still wished to display their wartime patriotism. They also spread across communities in Illinois and neighboring states as homegrown organizations entrusted with protecting the local population against subversive threats. Paradoxically, these loyal leagues operated under a statewide umbrella, and state leaders urged discretion in all matters related to the league. Its 1862 state constitution read, “Strict secrecy as to the WORKING of the organization is enjoined, and promptness and vigor in its extension are very important.”⁴³ The following year, in its annual meeting at Springfield, council members elaborated on the group’s overall mission:

The object of this League shall be to preserve Liberty and the Union of the United States of America, to maintain the Constitution thereof, and of the State of Illinois, and the supremacy of the laws, to put down the enemies of the Government and thwart the designs of traitors and disloyalists; and to protect, strengthen and defend all loyal men, without regard to sect, condition or party.

⁴¹ Klement, "Copperhead Secret Societies," 164-165.

⁴² Daily Illinois State Register, February 24, 1863.

⁴³ *Constitution of the U. L. of A., for the State of Illinois, Adopted by the Grand Council, September 25th, A. D. 1862, 1862.*

Leaders agreed to hold yearly meetings in Illinois's capital city, and they placed restrictions on prospective members. For instance, only "loyal white men" over the age of eighteen could join, and "no member of the Union League of America shall ever be absolved from its obligation."⁴⁴

Leagues had a larger presence in rural Illinois. The absence of men who enlisted in the army left these parts of the state vulnerable to Democratic ideologues and Copperhead sympathizers. This explains why leagues expanded quicker in smaller communities than in larger ones. For instance, of the twenty-one councils listed in Sangamon County in 1863, only four resided within Springfield's city limits. Leagues also served a different function in the more urban regions of the state. Though demonstrating no less devotion or commitment to the Union than their rural counterparts, members in city leagues concentrated on displaying and defining loyalty since there was less pressure to police the community from outside threats. After seeing their rosters climb in early 1862, membership lists shrank that fall with Republicans divided over the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation along with a string of military setbacks for the North. Their ranks quickly recovered in 1863 with the intensely partisan legislative session as well as, according to historian Thomas Bahde, "an aggressive campaign by members of the grand council to galvanize unionist citizens under a common banner."⁴⁵

League members in Springfield primarily used the organization to advance their political objectives and assist the local Republican Party. In March 1863, during the congressional recess, a coalition of the town's combined councils – referring to themselves as the "Springfield Illinois Union League" – sent a letter to Lincoln requesting that he remove the revenue collector of the Eighth Congressional District from office. This collector, they alleged, whose region included

⁴⁴ Constitution of the Grand Council of the U. L. A., for the State of Illinois. Adopted by the State Grand Council Assembled at Springfield, Sept. 2, A. D. 1863 (Springfield: Steam Press of Baker and Phillips, 1863).

⁴⁵ Bahde, "'Our Cause Is a Common One'," 89.

Springfield, knowingly employed “men who have always sympathized with the Rebellion, and being strongly suspected of being Copperheads.”⁴⁶ For Springfield’s female Republican population, the leagues’ rigid qualifications inspired some women to form their own association excluding male membership. Their stated mission was to provide for those families whose husbands and sons were off at war by giving them, according to the *Illinois State Journal*, “all the moral support in their power.”⁴⁷ But as with the other councils in town, politics played a prominent role in this league’s existence. In May 1863, Mercy Conkling observed a spike in female membership due to a growing number of ladies in Springfield “wearing copper head breast pins.”⁴⁸

Debating Loyalty and State Sovereignty: The Dustin Affair

On March 17, 1863, Emory P. Dustin, a lieutenant in the 58th Illinois Volunteers, shot and killed Wesley Pilcher on the streets of Springfield. Details of the event remain unclear, but the story that circulated around town was that an intoxicated Pilcher hopped onto an unattended wagon near a downtown saloon. The owner of the carriage, William O’Hara, recognized his wagon had been stolen and began chasing it. O’Hara caught up to Pilcher, but the carriage thief grabbed an iron pin and struck O’Hara’s head which began bleeding profusely. Lieutenant Dustin witnessed the confrontation between the two men and rushed over to O’Hara’s assistance. Pilcher, having overwhelmed O’Hara, began attacking Dustin. When Dustin found himself unable to break free from Pilcher’s grasp, the lieutenant grabbed for his revolver and shot Pilcher

⁴⁶ Springfield Illinois Union League to Abraham Lincoln, March 17, 1863, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

⁴⁷ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, May 12, 1863; Mercy Conkling to Clinton Conkling, May 19, 1863, Conkling Family Collection, ALPLM.

⁴⁸ Mercy Conkling to Clinton Conkling, May 19, 1863, Conkling Family Collection, ALPLM.

in the neck, killing him instantly. Not long afterward, the police sent Lieutenant Dustin to the city jail.⁴⁹

The event caused uproar in Springfield, adding to the city's already tense atmosphere. Yet the pandemonium stemmed from concerns unrelated to the murder of Pilcher. Once more facts of the encounter emerged, a majority of those in town believed Lieutenant Dustin acted in self-defense.⁵⁰ Instead, residents in Springfield split over Dustin's transfer from the municipal jail to military leaders at Camp Butler. Before the city police had an opportunity to file murder charges against the lieutenant, the commandant at Camp Butler, Colonel Lynch, ordered city officials to hand Dustin over to military authorities. Lynch did so for two reasons. First, he wanted to protect his lieutenant from angry townspeople who might seek retribution against Dustin for the previous ills soldiers inflicted on the community. Second, a majority of judges in Springfield were Democrats, and Lynch wanted to avoid the likelihood of a civilian trial conducted by justices of the peace who might be hostile to the war and those participating in it. Lynch based his decision on the recent Conscription Act, passed by President Lincoln just weeks before the incident occurred. Section 30 of the law stated that a member of the United States military who committed murder "in time of war, insurrection, or rebellion" would face a court martial or a military court. As a result, a military unit transferred Dustin to Camp Butler where he remained under guarded watch. Dustin was eventually acquitted, but the episode highlighted another hotly politicized issue in the city.⁵¹

⁴⁹ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, March 18, 1863. Both newspapers originally used the spelling "Dustan" before switching to "Dustin" once the trial began.

⁵⁰ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, March 19, 1863. Rumors that a mob had threatened to pull Dustin from his jail cell and hang him in the streets proved false. See Diary of William R. Wyllie, March 22, 1863, William Wyllie Collection, ALPLM.

⁵¹ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, April 1, 1863; Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon*, 159-160.

The Dustin episode turned into a debate over the state's – and the city's – sovereignty in a time of war. Did loyalty to the Union supersede one's loyalty to his state or community? Throughout Springfield, people questioned the interpretation of the ruling in the Conscription Act, especially the striking absence of the law's boundaries and jurisdiction. They wanted clarification on how far the measure stretched. Should it apply only to areas where war, insurrection, or rebellion had been declared, or were all regions of the country subject to the law? Mayor George Huntington believed that the act applied only to the former regions, arguing that martial law had not been declared in Springfield. Colonel Lynch was too literal in his interpretation of the Conscription Act, Huntington contended, and had overstepped his boundaries as military commander of a region that experienced no “danger of disturbance.” Huntington requested clarification of Lynch's directive in a letter to the commander of the Department of the Ohio, hoping to prevent similar conflicts between civilian and military leaders from occurring again.⁵²

Mayor Huntington was a Democrat, but his letter lacked the deep partisan tone that had grown familiar to Springfield discourse in early 1863. Other Democrats, however, lumped the Dustin affair into the ongoing debate over the war's boundaries. They worried that the matter might jeopardize the city's ability to prosecute crimes against soldiers, even petty violations such as drunkenness and vandalism. They considered this most recent act another instance of the federal government consolidating power away from the states; arguing that, in this case, military triumph had outstripped civilian authority. The Democratic *Register* concluded that the Dustin case and Colonel Lynch's interpretation of the Conscription Act might encourage some soldiers who got “it into their brave little heads to try some pistol or bayonet practice upon some

⁵² George L. Huntington to Major General Wright, Commander of the Department of the Ohio, March 21, 1863, in *Daily Illinois State Journal*, April 1, 1863.

dastardly citizen who was so utterly contemptible as not to wear Uncle Sam's uniform." In addition to its daily assaults on Lynch, the paper occasionally turned its attention to the soldiers involved with the affair. The *Register* decried the presence of troops from Camp Butler who arrived in order to protect Dustin on his transfer back to the military installation, speculating that they were only there "for the purpose of overawing the Court."⁵³

Republicans countered by defending Lynch's actions. Speaking to an audience in Springfield less than two weeks after the shooting, William Herndon, Lincoln's former law partner, argued that the Army's response was legal. Since Dustin was in the service of the United States, Herndon pointed out, the soldier was subject to the articles of war that tried combatants by court-martial or military commission. He pleaded for flexibility and patience in the face of evolving wartime policies. More importantly, Herndon sought to defend the federal government's actions during extraordinary circumstances. Local Democrats argued that the outcome of the Dustin case, along with other wartime measures, was a prime example of the Federal government's overreach. Herndon rejected this view, claiming that the government's actions and responses fit within the parameters of the U.S. Constitution. Quoting Section 6, he said the founding document "shall be *the supreme law* of the land, and the *Judges in every State shall be bound* thereby – anything in the constitution or laws of any State to the contrary notwithstanding."⁵⁴ Therefore, he supported the Army's right to try soldiers in military courts for crimes committed against civilians.

However, his explanation was not without bias. Herndon justified this particular soldier transfer while offering a scathing attack on the local Democratic judiciary. According to him, the

⁵³ *Daily Illinois State Register*, March 26, 1863. The *Journal* accused the *Register* of producing antiwar emotions during the trial and creating hostility toward all soldiers. See *Daily Illinois State Journal*, March 19, 26, 1863.

⁵⁴ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, March 19, 26, 1863 (emphasis retained).

local justices of the peace originally planned to put Dustin on trial for murder under state law before military authorities could transfer him back to Camp Butler. In the most impassioned part of his speech, Herndon laid out a counter-scenario where local lawyers and politicians held authority over military affairs:

If every petty, little, ignorant, narrow, malicious Justice of the Peace – who hates the Union by force of party ties – could arrest, try, and bind over the military force of the United States, then perjury or fictitious complaints of base and disloyal men would be as thick as sands on the sea-shore, and such men as Hooker on the Potomac, Rosecrans on the Mississippi, Burnside East, Grant West – just at the critical moment that Richmond was to be stormed – Vicksburg bombarded and taken, or New Orleans or Charleston, or rebeldom generally, then perjury would have full play – then jurisdiction, stolen and assumed, would be rife – then would Traitors and Treason have ample sway, and then woe to the Union, the Constitution and the laws.

The only way to avoid this chaotic scene, Herndon continued, was to place supreme authority in the laws of the federal government. Loyalty demanded that obedience to Union laws over state laws was necessary during a time of war.⁵⁵

The Politics of the Pulpit

Springfield's churches were also susceptible to the debates over loyalty disseminating from the State House and beyond. In actuality, politics and religion were rarely far from each other during this critical period of American history, but only a few institutions in town articulated that connection at the pulpit. Few church records in Springfield reflect upon the controversy overwhelming the capital in those early months of 1863, yet the debates over war and emancipation taking place throughout the city made their way inside several of Springfield's houses of worship. Loyalty to one's church was often a good indicator of where one stood on political issues, and sometimes vice-versa.

⁵⁵ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, March 26, 1863; Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon*, 159-160.

The histories of the First and Second Presbyterian Churches illustrate that point. A majority of townspeople identified as Presbyterian over any other religious faith. Five of the eighteen churches in the city at the beginning of the war were Presbyterian, including two Portuguese congregations. No other denomination had more than one parish in Springfield except for the Methodists, who had two church buildings.⁵⁶ Abraham Lincoln occasionally attended services at First Presbyterian, but unlike his wife, Mary, he never became a member. First Presbyterian attracted individuals with stronger ties to the South, people such as Lincoln and Mary Todd's family who emigrated from Kentucky. Worshippers at First Presbyterian generally had a more conservative outlook than members of the other Presbyterian place of worship, Second Church. Most parishioners at the Second Presbyterian Church preferred the New England antislavery theology delivered from the pulpit. These two churches serve as a microcosm of the settlement as well as the social and political makeup of Springfield society.

The division between the two churches revolved around the issue of slavery. Nearly twenty-five years before the war, the Sangamon Presbytery recommended that churches within the county, including Springfield, prohibit slaveholders from entering their congregations. Leaders of the presbytery also permitted members "to judge and proclaim every Christian who is a slaveholder."⁵⁷ Around the same time, Presbyterian Churches across the country split into two factions: Old School and New School. Old School Presbyterians accepted slavery and justified the institution on biblical teachings. They also denounced abolitionist sermons from the lectern. In 1857, three years before Lincoln's presidential election, Old School leaders in Illinois passed a resolution upholding their desire to keep any national discussion of slavery out of its sanctuaries:

⁵⁶ John Carroll Power, *History of Springfield, Illinois: Its Attractions as a Home and Advantages for Business, Manufacturing, Etc.* (Springfield, Ill.: Illinois State Journal Print, 1871), 52-4.

⁵⁷ Inventory of the Church Archives of Illinois, pp. 23, First Presbyterian Church Collection, ALPLM.

“Resolved, That we disapprove of all and every means by which the question of slavery or anti-slavery has been in any way connected with the Theological Seminary of the Northwest.” After the firing on Fort Sumter in 1861, First Presbyterian followed the national Old School’s call for loyalty to the Federal Government, yet avoiding all slavery-related issues.⁵⁸

Second Presbyterian Church followed a different route. It was a member of the New School Presbytery, favoring the Sangamon Presbytery’s position against slaveholders in 1837. Before the Civil War, people throughout the city referred to Second Presbyterian Church as the “Abolition Church.” During the war, it became known as the “Union Church,” monikers that the congregation’s members proudly accepted. Of the twenty-one Springfield residents who became charter members of the Illinois Anti-Slavery Society in 1837, thirteen were members of Second Church. In 1843, the church excommunicated a member for “purchasing or dealing in human beings.” The congregation accepted African-American members, denounced the Fugitive Slave Law, and withstood attack threats by many in the community.⁵⁹

Albert Hale was the second minister at Second Presbyterian, presiding over the congregation for nearly thirty years. His fiery personality mixed well with the church’s activist mission. Born in Connecticut in 1799 and a graduate of Yale, Hale moved to Illinois in 1831 as part of the American Home Missionary Society. This group consisted of young men who, upon graduating from college, vowed to bring their Christian teachings to the growing population of the Old Northwest. Hale shamelessly raised controversy in his early years at the head of Second Presbyterian. In 1847, he gave sermons in his church that denounced the war between the United

⁵⁸ Inventory of the Church Archives of Illinois, pp. 27-8, First Presbyterian Church Collection, ALPLM; Howard F. Rissler, *The First Century of the First Congregational Church of Springfield, Illinois* (Springfield, Ill.: Byers Printing Co., 1967), 10-11.

⁵⁹ Session Minutes, Second Presbyterian Church, Undated; Angle, *Here I Have Lived*, 79-80.

States and Mexico, calling the conflict “a crime against God and man.”⁶⁰ The discourse proved so divisive that a member of the 1847 state constitutional convention condemned Hale’s actions as “unbecoming a minister of the gospel to use such language in a gospel sermon,” and threatened injury to the minister the next time he arrived in the Capitol building to offer a morning invocation. The issue remained unresolved eight days later when another convention member proposed a resolution barring all chaplains from opening each day’s session with a prayer.⁶¹ This last measure ultimately failed, but Hale never provided the scriptural remarks for the rest of the session.

Hale’s outspoken favorability for the war and emancipation, while unsettling many in Springfield, attracted a number of the newer settlers and visitors to the city between 1861 and 1865. Soldiers in the area attended services at Second Presbyterian if the timing was suitable to their military regimen, yet even those unaffiliated with the military found their way inside the congregation during the war years. The church’s reputation and support for Lincoln’s policies were important factors. For instance, in May 1863, the church accepted a member request from an emigrant from Tennessee “on account of his union policies.” Sunday services became so crowded during this period that some councilmembers made plans to construct a new building (opened in 1871) while others helped form the First Congregational Church after Hale’s retirement in 1866.⁶² Not all members, however, welcomed the church’s endorsement for

⁶⁰ *Two Discourses on the Subject of the War Between the U. States and Mexico; Preached in the Second Presbyterian Church, in Springfield, on Sabbath, 11th July, 1847, by Albert Hale, Pastor of the Church*, (Springfield, Illinois: The Sangamo Journal, 1847), 14.

⁶¹ *Journal of the Convention, Assembled at Springfield, June 7, 1847, in Pursuance of an Act of the General Assembly of the State of Illinois: Approved, February 20, 1847, for the Purpose of Altering, Amending, or Revising the Constitution of the State of Illinois*, (Springfield, Illinois: Lanphier and Walker, 1847), 167, 186.

⁶² Second Presbyterian Church, Session Minutes, July 5, 1863. See also Mercy Conkling to Clinton Conkling, May 19, 1863, Conkling Family Collection, ALPLM; *Daily Illinois State Journal*, May 23, 1863; Rissler, *The First Century of the First Congregational Church of Springfield, Illinois*, 10-11.

Lincoln's wartime policies. After voters rejected the New State Constitution in the summer of 1862, one of Springfield's leading Democratic figures Benjamin S. Edwards felt compelled to switch his family's membership from Second Presbyterian to First Presbyterian based on his political views. "Poor man!" Mercy Conkling wrote, a member of the Second Church. "Politics I fear will prove a terrible snare to [Edwards's] soul. He has left a church against whom his only charge is that the majority of its members are opposed to him in political opinions."⁶³

Noyes M. Miner, minister of Springfield's Baptist Church, also sprinkled politics into his sermons. Like Hale, Miner hailed from and attended college in the New England region. Miner railed against slavery from the pulpit, but he often faced a less sympathetic congregation than Second Presbyterian. Miner's church drew new followers once he gained a reputation for providing supportive "war sermons," but some of his conservative members struggled with the preacher's antislavery convictions. He had difficulty finding balance between the two stances. One member with Southern ties told him privately, "Mr. Miner, I like your sermons but your prayers almost kill me." Miner's political activism reached beyond the pulpit. On Election Day 1860, the minister assisted by working the voter polls all day, doing "the hardest day's work he ever did challenging votes and trying to keep things straight." And in 1863, the minister won election for school county commissioner as a "Union" candidate. Miner also had a close relationship with President Lincoln, residing on the same street when both lived in Springfield, and the minister was one of the few clergymen in town who backed Lincoln's 1860 presidential campaign.⁶⁴

⁶³ Mercy Conkling to Clinton Conkling, June 23, 1862, Conkling Family Collection, ALPLM.

⁶⁴ Mercy Conkling to Clinton Conkling, November 27, 1863, Conkling Family Collection, ALPLM; Mary Miner Hill Recollections, March 21, 1923, Mary Miner Hill Collection, ALPLM; *Daily Illinois State Journal*, November 9, 1863; Carwardine, *Lincoln*, 132.

The majority of churches in Springfield, however, either rejected antislavery politics or preferred that preachers refrain from the topic altogether. A few in town lashed out against abolitionists and their ilk, such as William T. Bennett, former pastor of the Methodist-Episcopal Church. Bennett railed against Lincoln's policies and called the president a tyrant. But for the most part, at least before secession, Springfield's Sunday sermons avoided the slavery issue that divided the country; Hale and Miner drew attention to themselves and their places of worship, often in a negative way. As a child, Miner's daughter Mary recalled that other ministers in town, upon noticing either her father or Reverend Hale on the street, "would cross over on the other side rather than speak to them."⁶⁵

Lewis P. Clover, pastor of St. Paul's Protestant Episcopal Church, was one of the few religious leaders who unabashedly displayed Copperhead sympathies throughout the war. When Roger B. Taney passed away in 1864, Reverend Clover offered a heartfelt eulogy of the former Supreme Court chief justice that following Sunday. The minister predicted that history would be kind to Taney "when the memory of those who malign him will have passed into oblivion, or be thought of with feelings of pity and contempt." Clover also offered veiled critiques of the war's progress while refusing to utter Lincoln's name. "Shall the wise and the good in the land," people such as Taney, "be condemned and stricken down because they will not join in the cry[?]" Given that Clover delivered his eulogy two days before the 1864 presidential election; that Lincoln and Taney had distinct political and legal disagreements; and that the sermon

⁶⁵ Duncan Ingraham to Ned Ingraham, January 16, 1863, Ingraham Family Collection, ALPLM; Mary Miner Hill Recollections, March 21, 1923, Mary Miner Hill Collection, ALPLM.

occurred in the president's hometown, these provide hints into the preacher's theological and political outlook.⁶⁶

Other preachers had a difficult time balancing religion and politics. On August 6, 1863, a date set aside as a national day of thanksgiving, James L. Crane, minister of the Methodist-Episcopal Church, addressed a joint gathering of worshippers from First Presbyterian, Third Presbyterian, and the two Methodist Churches. Crane, a Democrat who supported the war but objected to Republican handling of it, gave a sermon that sounded more like a campaign stump speech with religious references scattered throughout. He denounced secessionists, whom he called "fanatics," for conspiring to take Southern states out of the Union and thereby instigating the war. But he also laid blame on Northerners, arguing that the extreme wings of the two political parties had produced a hostile environment that few Southerners could accept. Crane used this thanksgiving platform to criticize the two-party strife that currently embroiled the North. "Good and loyal as we may be in the North, yet this poison has defiled our political atmosphere." Crane's definition of loyalty was one that lined up with George Washington's Presidential Farewell Address. Washington warned against party factions upon his departure, declaring that this antagonism "agitates the community with ill-founded jealousies and false alarms" and "kindles the animosity of one part against another." Crane even admitted his willingness to sacrifice his faith if it meant preservation of the nation he enjoyed. "[A]s much as I revere and love my branch of the Church, and am attached to her manners and customs," he

⁶⁶ Lewis P. Clover, "Chief Justice Taney: A Sermon, Preached in St. Paul's Church, Springfield, Ill., November 6th, 1864, by the Rector, Rev. L. P. Clover, D.D." (Springfield, Ill.: 1864), 8-11.

said, “yet, if the obliteration of her name and peculiarities from the history of Christianity will save my country, let my Church go, let her be forgotten rather than my country shall fall.”⁶⁷

Crane, similar to a large share of Springfield Democrats, failed to explain what that country should look like. He rarely, if ever, mentioned slavery’s possible connection to the ongoing conflict, nor the fact that the majority of the Southern “fanatics” he accused of provoking war were slaveholders. He was purposely vague on the legality of measures passed such as the Emancipation Proclamation. Crane often referred to the “laws of the land” in his sermon without actually defining them to his audience. “One of the numberless sins of which we have been guilty and of which we should repent,” he said, “is the disposition to disobey the laws of the land; and to set ourselves against the constituted authority.” He fervently defended the Constitution as the protector of his country, and he worried that some political leaders – without mentioning a single name – had governed beyond its powers. Crane read parts of Lincoln’s proclamation honoring that day of thanksgiving, the pastor noting his agreement with the president that recent Union “military successes furnish reasonable grounds for augmented confidence that the Union of these States will be maintained.” However, once he got to Lincoln’s final phrase “their Constitution preserved,” Crane added “as it is” to the ending.⁶⁸

Crane raised suspicion later that year with his participation at the Methodist Annual Conference held in Springfield. To demonstrate their denomination’s loyalty to the war, leading Methodist ministers at the convention proposed a set of resolutions that aligned with Republican

⁶⁷ James L. Crane, “A Discourse Delivered by Rev. J. L. Crane, in the Third Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Illinois, on the Occasion of the National Thanksgiving, August 6, 1863, at Which Time Were Assembled the Congregations of the First and Third Presbyterian and Methodist Churches,” (Springfield, Ill.: 1863), 12-15.

⁶⁸ *The New York Times*, July 16, 1863; Crane, A Discourse Delivered by Rev. J. L. Crane, 5, 11. For more on the challenges some Northern ministers faced blending politics and religion, and the backlash some experienced by keeping the two separate, see George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 24-25.

principles. They identified slavery as “the primary cause of this rebellion,” they defended the Emancipation Proclamation as a military necessity and as a “moral sense of the civilized world,” and they permitted labeling someone disloyal if they failed to demonstrate absolute “sympathy with, and loyalty to, the government of his country.” Crane and a minority of other ministers opposed the committee’s resolutions, arguing they were too extreme and too specific over how one should define a loyal citizen. Alternatively, he offered a set of resolutions that encouraged the continuation of the war in order to “maintain the Constitution and preserve the Union.” Crane’s resolutions, however, said nothing about slavery’s role as a cause of war nor did they include any reference to the Emancipation Proclamation. The convention’s pro-Republican majority handily voted down Crane’s resolutions, and the move cast doubt over Crane’s loyalty that lingered with him long after the convention adjourned.⁶⁹ Crane symbolized the thorny position of Democrats in Springfield and throughout Illinois who continued to support the war in 1863 but considered emancipation unconstitutional.⁷⁰ He embodied the limitations of loyalty in Lincoln’s hometown.

Springfield Patronage: Loyalty to the Union or Loyalty to Lincoln?

Lastly, before the legislature reconvened, there was one final development that further obscured the definition of loyalty during war, a matter that had been in flux since Lincoln won the presidency. In this particular instance, the debate over loyalty reached beyond the back-and-

⁶⁹ Bryon C. Andreasen, "As Good a Right to Pray": Copperhead Christians on the Northern Civil War Home Front" (Dissertation, University of Illinois, 1998), 148-149.

⁷⁰ Bryon C. Andreasen argues that “political tests became the measure of religious faith” in many areas throughout states in the Northwest during the war. Churchgoers often expected to hear sermons denouncing the Confederacy *and* expressing undivided support for the Republican-directed war. See above citation and Bryon C. Andreasen, “Civil War Church Trials: Repressing Dissent on the Northern Home Front,” in Paul A. Cimbala and Randall M. Miller, eds., *An Uncommon Time: The Civil War and the Northern Home Front* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 240-241.

forth between Republicans and Democrats in Springfield. This had to do with patronage, or the issuing of appointed positions, one of the few subjects that bitterly divided Republicans in town. Once elected president, Lincoln was responsible for appointing individuals to fill various posts, including official positions in Springfield. As a result, and something that troubled anyone coveting a prized (and not-so-prized) appointment, these often became contests between those who figured themselves among the incoming commander-in-chief's dearest friends. Some rightly predicted their association with Lincoln was close enough to garner an appointment; not so for others. In other words, who was a part of Lincoln's inner circle prior to his taking the presidential oath, and what could they expect in return for their loyalty and friendship?⁷¹

Notwithstanding the political barrier between the two parties in Springfield, Lincoln received requests for office and other favors from local Republicans and Democrats alike. The majority of these requests appeared before he departed for Washington in 1861, yet he could only grant a fraction of them. He left Springfield having already turned down most wishful seekers. Henry Clay Whitney, a lawyer from Urbana who rode the Illinois legal circuit with Lincoln in the 1850s, chalked this up to Lincoln's concern that the rest of the country might wonder if "I'm going to fill up *all* the offices from Illinois."⁷² Some Democrats pursuing an appointment for themselves or for acquaintances had a familial relationship with Lincoln, such as his cousin-in-law John T. Stuart and brothers-in-law Clark M. Smith and Ninian W. Edwards. Others, including the owner of the *Register*, Charles H. Lanphier, sought the occasional favor

⁷¹ Incidentally, Carl R. Fish's 1902 article "Lincoln and the Patronage" never mentions the president's hometown relationships or the controversy surrounding Ninian W. Edwards's appointment, discussed below. The closest he touches the subject is with the line: "Mrs. Lincoln's 'numerous cousins' were occasionally aided in securing favors." See Carl Russell Fish, "Lincoln and the Patronage," *The American Historical Review* 8, no. 1 (1902). Quotation found on page 67.

⁷² Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, eds., *Herndon's Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements About Abraham Lincoln* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 618-619.

from their neighbor-in-chief. Despite regularly attacking Lincoln in his daily press, Lanphier appealed to the president (through Governor Yates) for a “lieutenantcy” for “Robert G. Walters, of this city,” and son of “the old editor of the State Register” who died serving in the Mexican-American War. In forwarding the request to Lincoln, Yates added, “I believe it would be a good thing to make the above appointment as Lanphier would feel much complimented.”⁷³ By far the majority of requests, however, came from political allies in town. This was hardly a surprising trend, yet few foresaw the way patronage would split Republicans living and governing in Springfield. Over the course of the war, many in town were forced to reexamine their level of friendship with Lincoln. Debates ensued over who was a closer companion to Lincoln and which of these local Republicans were the most loyal to the president. Presidential appointments, for better or worse, functioned as a means at settling these disputes.

Hints of the trouble to come emerged before Lincoln left for the White House. After the 1860 election, Lincoln was bombarded with requests from citizens across the country hoping to land official positions. However, as Lincoln scholar Roy P. Basler once noted, his “Illinois friends caused him more trouble after he was elected President than did the citizens of any other Union state.”⁷⁴ The explanation for this was simple: instead of sending a note of application directly to the president, several prospective candidates sent their requests to someone (or perhaps more than one person) who knowingly interacted with the president-elect on a regular or semi-regular basis, a mediator as such. Afterward, the mediator would (hopefully) put in a good word for the applicant as they passed the note along to the president. The dilemma occurred

⁷³ Charles Lanphier to Richard Yates, September 24, 1861; Richard Yates to Abraham Lincoln, October 4, 1861, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

⁷⁴ Roy P. Basler, “President Lincoln Helps His Old Friends,” *Abraham Lincoln Association* (1977): 3.

when Lincoln received requests from multiple mediators, as well as those times the mediator sought a position for him or herself.

That was the case when it came to filling the appointment of Springfield postmaster in 1861. Since his decision would inevitably leave many with hurt feelings, the episode illustrated the awkward situation the city placed Lincoln in and it urged caution to anyone seeking future appointments requiring Lincoln's approval. In April 1861, while developments at Fort Sumter consumed the country's – and Lincoln's – interest, some in the president's hometown were pressing him to fill the postmaster position with their respective candidates. Lincoln received the names of several contenders from various advocates, virtually all expecting their nominee to receive the appointment. A strong push was made for Elizabeth Grimsley, the cousin and close friend of Mary Lincoln who, incidentally, was staying with the Lincoln family at Mary's request as they transitioned into the White House.⁷⁵ “Many of us Republicans here wish Lincoln would appoint Mrs Grimsley to the P. O. of this City,” Louis Rosette wrote his friend John G. Nicolay. “I believe there could be nothing said to it & think it would give general satisfaction Of course he will do as he please & would not take my advise.”⁷⁶ But Lincoln could hardly “do as he please[d],” considering the number of connections he had with the nominees and their nominators. His cousin-in-law and former law partner John T. Stuart presumed the task of selecting a postmaster was troubling Lincoln, and he offered the president some advice: “There is a good deal of feeling among the different candidates and their friends and no appointment you

⁷⁵ Grimsley kept a diary during her six month time with the Lincoln family, reflecting on several noteworthy affairs beginning with the presidential train ride from Illinois to Washington, formal dinners at the White House, the secession crisis, military encampments around the nation's capital, gloomy reactions following the Battle of Bull Run, diplomatic troubles with England, as well as excursions beyond Washington with Mrs. Lincoln and her sons. Grimsley never mentioned the postmaster position in her diaries. See Elizabeth Todd Grimsley, "Six Months in the White House," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (1908-1984)* 19, no. 3/4 (1926).

⁷⁶ Louis Rosette to John G. Nicolay, April 13, 1861, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

can make would be very satisfactory,” Stuart informed Lincoln. “[I]f I were you I would please myself.”⁷⁷ Again, “please” hardly seems to be the appropriate term here, but Lincoln eventually tapped his friend John Armstrong for the position.

The result, as anyone might predict, did more harm than good. Grimsley withdrew her name from consideration when she learned of Lincoln’s misgivings that, as she explained it three years later, “a Post-Mistress in a place the size of Springfield would produce dis-satisfaction.”⁷⁸ Others still in contention for the post were equally stung once they realized they had been passed over. Seymour B. Moody was certain he would earn the position, and after proven incorrect his wife sent a personal note to the president describing the dismay she and her family underwent after hearing the news. “We felt the disapointment more for these reasons your wife told me the last time she called to see me that when you come to disspence offices you would remember Mr Moody.” This was one more misfortune to their household, she added, coming off a difficult few months in which their son was severely injured, she was unable to shake whatever illness was ailing her, and Seymour was “out of business and no prospect of any.” Even though she was distraught, Mrs. Moody was at least sympathetic to the task facing Lincoln: “May God bless you and make you a blessing to our beloved country is my daly prayer.”⁷⁹

Less compassionate was Richard Yates. The governor was offended that his preferred candidate, local businessman Abner Ellis, did not receive the appointment. “I have never felt so heart sick at any disappointment,” Yates wrote Lincoln afterward. Moreover, since Lincoln had yet to honor any of Yates’s previous recommendations, then “as Governor of your State, I was

⁷⁷ John T. Stuart to Abraham Lincoln, April 3, 1861, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

⁷⁸ The same result occurred in 1864, and Grimsley was again unsuccessful in her bid to become the city’s first female postmaster. Elizabeth J. Grimsley to Abraham Lincoln, November 22, 1864, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

⁷⁹ Mrs. Seymour B. Moody to Abraham Lincoln, July 19, 1861, Lincoln Collection, LOC. As a consolation, Lincoln agreed to appoint Moody either quartermaster or commissary of subsistence. But Moody declined both since these posts might relocate him outside of Springfield.

entitled to have from you the small favor of this appointment, when it was backed by petitions, which should have been controlling, without my name.” Notice the emphasis here. Yates was mystified why Lincoln had refused to honor this recommendation, especially since “I have always had the strongest friendship for you.”⁸⁰

Entitlement. Friendship. The postmaster incident, as with others that followed, made several in Springfield, especially those who considered themselves close acquaintances with the president, question these attributes and wonder if they possessed any value. Jealousy could be added to this list since Lincoln appointed some Springfield connections while denying others. Those benefitting from Lincoln’s office included his friend and former law partner Ward Hill Lamon, who was appointed U.S. marshal for the District of Columbia; Joseph Baker, son of *Illinois State Journal* editor Edward L. Baker, who was commissioned an officer in the Marine Corps; local businessman James L. Lamb, who was granted a contract to supply the Army; and a relatively unknown young black man named William H. Johnson who served the president in various capacities after Lincoln brought him along to the White House. Johnson was at Lincoln’s bedside on the return trip from Gettysburg in 1863 when smallpox struck the president, and Lincoln covered Johnson’s burial expenses after the latter died from his own bout with the fatal disease in 1864.⁸¹ More than a few in Springfield and elsewhere complained that many of those receiving favors were members of the Todd clan, a point that vexed Lincoln throughout his presidency.⁸²

Similar complaints surfaced early in the war from those who wanted better Illinois representation among the military’s top command. Why, they asked, would Lincoln deny his

⁸⁰ Richard Yates to Abraham Lincoln, July 31, 1861, Lincoln Collection, LOC. (Emphasis maintained.)

⁸¹ Basler, "President Lincoln Helps His Old Friends," 6-7, 10, 14-15.

⁸² Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life*, vol. 2, 267-268.

home state the glory it deserved? Jesse K. Dubois, a friend yet also a regular critic of Lincoln's patronage handlings, worried that the president had forgotten his pre-White House relationships. "Do you know that you have not as yet appointed a single man from Illinois that was originally your friend," Dubois informed Lincoln. "[A]nd all this stuff about congressman this shall be so and that shall not be, is only a blind to crowd out your friends and put in soreheads and Grumblers." Yates was equally exasperated with the president. "You still refuse us a Major General. Illinois has no identity, no distinctive recognition ... except to send her brave regiments to guard bridges and railroads in other States," the governor implored.⁸³ And John Pope, from his military headquarters in Springfield, was down on the Prairie State's snub. "It would clearly appear that Illinois as the fourth State in the Union is entitled to have the appt. of one Brig[adier] Gen[era]l." Pope assumed he was in line to receive this rank, buoyed by the fact that he hailed from the president's home state. When promotion eluded him in 1861, an admittedly hurt Pope was astounded by Lincoln's actions. "I live to see what I never expected on the earth, myself driven out of the Army by a President from Illinois."⁸⁴ Where was Lincoln's loyalty to his home?

As Roy P. Basler also correctly asserted, "The attitude of Lincoln's Illinois friends and constituents in general was, to say the least, highly possessive and demanding. One gets the impression that they thought they owned the President, and the entire Civil War for that matter."⁸⁵ That was certainly the sentiment shared by Springfielder Mary Brayman, evident in her efforts to accelerate her husband Mason's promotion in the Army in 1863. In a letter to Mason, Mary outlined her plan to travel to Washington and appeal her case directly to the

⁸³ Jesse K. Dubois to Abraham Lincoln, April 6, 1861; Richard Yates to Abraham Lincoln, July 31, 1861, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

⁸⁴ John Pope to Orville H. Browning, June 23, 1861, O. H. Browning Collection, ALPLM. (Emphasis retained.) Pope would eventually be commissioned a major general in the Army.

⁸⁵ Basler, "President Lincoln Helps His Old Friends," 11.

president. “I have faith in Mr Lincoln, and I expect to get what I ask for,” she said. “I will then say that I will remain in Wash. till the document is prepared.”⁸⁶

When Lincoln refused to grant Springfield requests however, his friends were dumbfounded, at least some anyway. For all of the spoils he apparently provided his friends, it is worth noting that William Herndon never served in office during Lincoln’s presidency, though he was offered an assignment as a claims adjuster. But Herndon never held a grudge against his former law partner. Not so for Dubois who felt betrayed by the lack of appointments directed his way. Dubois requested patronage appointments for himself and his son-in-law living in Indiana, only to be passed over for other applicants. Lincoln explained that Dubois’s residency was to blame. “Uncle Jesse,” as Lincoln often referred to his friend, “there is no reason why I don’t want to appoint you, but there is one why I can’t,— you are from the town I live in myself.”⁸⁷ Apparently there was a limit to the number of positions Lincoln could dole out to his hometown, regardless of whether anyone inside or outside of Springfield agreed with that sentiment.

These attitudes aside, nothing offended the president’s Springfield friends more than those instances when Lincoln appointed or retained a Democratic official. In 1861, Archer Herndon, the father of William Herndon, was under scrutiny while serving as the Springfield land officer, an appointment he earned during James Buchanan’s presidency. Unlike his son, Archer was an outspoken critic of war, prompting questions over his loyalty and whether he was still fit to serve in office. One man in town by the name P. Robb, a self-described “country Democrat but true to the stars and stripes,” asked Lincoln if the president planned to keep “in office a man who lett’s no opportunity pass to show his sympathy with the trators.” Even though Lincoln eventually replaced Herndon later that year, William felt obligated to defend his elder’s

⁸⁶ Mary Brayman to Mason Brayman, August 31, 1863, Bailhache-Brayman Collection, ALPLM.

⁸⁷ Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life*, 84-85.

reputation. “My father is not a secessionist -- is a strong Union man -- for the Constitution, & the laws.” The difference, William continued, was the fact that Archer “hates war -- all war, and is bold to say so.” Others subscribed to this principle, the younger Herndon pointed out. Why, then, should his father be singled out? Why should anyone who has the slightest disagreement with the war’s direction be lumped with traitors? “I had a conversation with the ‘old cock,’” William informed John G. Nicolay, “and I know he is for the Union and against secession and its doctrines; but wants peace.” William stood up for his father the same way others did so in order to protect an individual’s right to question all or parts of the war without fear of association with the enemy.⁸⁸

For the most part, Lincoln’s Republican partners in the city failed to understand why the president demonstrated more loyalty to political foes over friends. They resented it when he offered positions to potential political allies – especially Democrats – while neglecting longstanding alliances. One of Springfield’s top beneficiaries of Lincoln’s presidency, Ward Hill Lamon, recognized this worrying tactic. “Lincoln’s weak point is to cajole & pet his enemies,” Lamon claimed, “and to allow his friends to be sacrificed and quietly look on and witness the success of his enemies at the expense and downfall of his friends.”⁸⁹ Lincoln infuriated John C. Conkling and fellow Republicans in town when the president nominated Isaac B. Curran, a Springfield Democrat, to serve as U.S. Consul for the Grand Duchy of Baden. “Our people feel disheartened, discouraged, & disgraced,” Conkling wrote to Lyman Trumbull in May 1862, “and are ready to curse the administration and all that belong to it for its ill advised and outrageous

⁸⁸ P. Robb to Abraham Lincoln, June 1, 1861; William Herndon to John G. Nicolay, August 1, 1861, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

⁸⁹ Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life*, 86.

appointments.”⁹⁰ Dubois and Conkling were two of the townsmen leading the charge to have Lincoln’s remains buried in Springfield in 1865. But for now, they felt Lincoln had betrayed his hometown Republican compatriots.

The problem, hopefully clear by now, was that the war prohibited competing views over what it meant to be loyal, at least as far as Republicans were concerned. By far the most controversial episode involving political patronage and loyalty was the case of Ninian Wirt Edwards. The incident, like the one with Archer Herndon, goes back to 1861 when Lincoln was dispensing official assignments. Lincoln appointed his brother-in-law Ninian Edwards a captain and the commissary of subsistence in Springfield. Edwards was a former Whig with Lincoln, but instead found a home in the Democratic Party after the Whigs collapsed. Edwards also had a checkered past before receiving the position, so it was little surprise that his appointment infuriated Springfield Republicans. More than that, though, they protested the appointment due to Edwards’s close relationship with disgraced Illinois Governor Joel Matteson. Matteson, also a Democrat, left office in 1857 under a cloud of corruption, and the city’s Republican leaders were stunned that Lincoln had failed to make this connection when he approved Edwards’s appointment.⁹¹

In fact, that Lincoln even considered Edwards for the post caught some by surprise. In an 1861 letter to the president, Ozias M. Hatch, William Butler, and Jesse K. Dubois expressed concern over rumors that Edwards might be considered for an appointment. “For several years we have been ferriting out, and exposing, the most stupendous and unprecedented frauds ever perpetrated in this country, by men closely connected with Mr Edwards,” they asserted.

⁹⁰ *The New York Times*, July 17, 1862; *ibid*, 87.

⁹¹ Lincoln was in fact aware of the controversy surrounding Edwards’s past, suspicious of his brother-in-law’s supposedly dire financial position in 1861. But the president was sensitive to Edwards’s predicament, writing, “I am unwilling, of course, that you should be deprived of a chance to make something, if it can be done without injustice to the Government, or to any individual.” See Basler, “President Lincoln Helps His Old Friends,” 8.

“Knowing all this we cannot, as we have said, believe it to be true.” In the improbable likelihood that the report was accurate, however, they wanted Lincoln to know that they, as his political colleagues, “in the most emphatic manner, do most solemnly protest against it.”⁹² These protests were primarily limited to Republicans from Springfield. Nevertheless, as the president’s hometown friends, Edwards’s appointment insulted them since they assumed their opinions mattered when it came to official state developments. Another Springfield acquaintance, William B. Thomas, informed the president that his political allies in town were offended by the affair. “The Governor and state officers here, think you should have consulted them more about state affairs than you have,” Thomas said, “and that if they ever had any, they have lost consequence at the White House.”⁹³ That was the mood in the fall of 1861, when most Illinois headlines were covering the General John C. Frémont imbroglio in Missouri discussed in chapter three.

The issue subsided somewhat until resurfacing in late-May 1863, just ahead of the legislative session’s reconvening. The strengthened position of Illinois Democrats in early 1863 brought renewed interest to the issue of political patronage. The political climate was far murkier than two years earlier as leading Republicans in Springfield genuinely fretted over the threat that Democratic opposition posed to the war’s continuation. They again attempted to get their concerns across to Lincoln, hoping he would be more receptive to them this time around. They repeated their complaints concerning Ninian Edwards’s behavior as well as criticisms of the quartermaster in town, William H. Bailhache. In what appears to be a coordinated attempt at getting the president’s attention, Springfield’s Republican and business elite sent multiple letters

⁹² Ozias M. Hatch, William Butler, Jesse K. Dubois to Abraham Lincoln, July 22, 1861, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

⁹³ William B. Thomas to Abraham Lincoln, September 28, 1861, Lincoln Collection, LOC. Two non-Springfield Republicans supported Edwards’s appointment. See David Davis to Abraham Lincoln, July 26, 1861; Orville H. Browning to Abraham Lincoln, November 8, 1861, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

to the White House urging the immediate removal of these men from office along with their worries over other Democratic officeholders in the city. Jesse K. Dubois informed Lincoln that Edwards and Bailhache had abused their positions by providing patronage to the “enemies” of the president’s administration in order to “amass fortunes with a rapidity which is a disgrace to the Government and a Scandal to its supporters.” More importantly, “You cannot afford to keep them here,” Dubois warned, “at the risk of alienating the affections of your neighbors and life-long friends.”⁹⁴

Life-long friends, a statement intended to remind Lincoln of relationships back in Springfield he would be wise not to overlook. Ten local men endorsed Dubois’s letter, adding “We ... cannot believe that the Government will keep men in positions of trust whose characters are worse than doubtful....”⁹⁵ “It is certain that most of the contracts have been given to men,” Ozias M. Hatch wrote in a separate letter to Lincoln, “that denounce your administration, and sympathize with rebels.”⁹⁶ Jacob Bunn was more blunt: There were men in Springfield “having no sympathy with your administration, who have not only been living off of the General Government for the past two years but getting rich from the stealings; ... and whose pecuniary interest is not to put down the rebellion but to prolong it, in order to make more money.”⁹⁷ George R. Weber, former Democrat-turned-Lincoln supporter, understood the president’s decision to place Democrats in official positions in 1861 as a way to demonstrate a willingness to work with those across the political aisle. But the time for goodwill had passed, he said:

The attempt to concilliate the mutinous democratic party in the north by the bestowment of office upon many of their influential men, was ascribed, no doubt justly, to the ardent

⁹⁴ Jesse K. Dubois to Abraham Lincoln, May 23, 1863, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

⁹⁵ Jesse K. Dubois to Abraham Lincoln, May 23, 1863, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

⁹⁶ Ozias M. Hatch to Abraham Lincoln, May 25, 1863, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

⁹⁷ Jacob Bunn to Abraham Lincoln, May 25, 1863, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

impulses of a patriotic heart. Had it succeeded as it ought to have done, we would have applauded you as an able strategist; but unfortunately for our country, many of the democrats thus honored, are using the power and influence acquired by virtue of their official position against the government and friends of the government, and to enrich themselves and friends, by fat if not fraudulent contracts.

In fact, Weber claimed that one prominent Democrat had his building “fitted up” for “the Democratic Club or Golden Circle in this city. For Liberty's sake,” he appealed to the president, “for our country's sake and for God's sake, put down as you can, as easily as you can turn your hand, this nest of Copperheads.”⁹⁸

These were the same men using all means possible to rein in a Democratic menace they believed threatened the area in 1863. Aside from Yates's request for troops to guard the Capitol building earlier that year, however, this was the only instance in which they sought Lincoln's assistance in that effort. They flooded the president with their patronage concerns because he alone possessed the power to resolve them, and this was not a situation that could be ignored. They therefore came up with a strategy in their letter-writing campaign to Lincoln. First, each author apologized for taking up the president's time with his message; this was a pattern largely absent two years earlier in their correspondence with him. Second, despite the gulf that had developed between Lincoln and his hometown, they alluded to their old ties in order to effectively confront this supposedly treacherous Illinois Democracy. If Lincoln heard of the abuse occurring in town from as many voices as possible, he would have to respond to it; at minimum, he might remove individuals such as Edwards and Bailhache who benefitted from their corruptive practices.

⁹⁸ George R. Weber to Abraham Lincoln, May 25, 1863, Lincoln Collection, LOC. See also letters from William Yates to Abraham Lincoln, May 22, 1863; Shelby M. Cullom to Abraham Lincoln, May 25, 1863, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

In the end, Lincoln obliged his friends because he was generally sympathetic to their concerns. Nevertheless, the episode noticeably upset him. At a time when Northern Armies were enduring setbacks on every major front, by far their lowest ebb of the four-year contest, Lincoln was scarcely interested in resolving a petty political squabble amongst his friends back home. Shortly after receiving these complaints from Springfield, Lincoln wrote a curt response to the fourteen men involved in the communication. “Gentlemen, Agree among yourselves upon any two of your own number, one of whom to be Quarter-Master, and the other to be Commissary to serve at Springfield, Illinois, and send me their names, and I will appoint them.”⁹⁹ They did so, and Lincoln followed through with his promise, hopeful that the issue was settled.

Unfortunately, that was not the end of it. Edwards, Bailhache, and their defenders pressed Lincoln to reverse the order, again putting the president in the unenviable position of choosing between friends and family. “The trouble with me is of a different character,” Lincoln explained in a letter to Edward L. Baker, editor of the *Journal*. “Springfield is my home, and there, more than elsewhere, are my life-long friends,” also using the above-mentioned phrase. “These, for now nearly two years, have been harrassing me because of Mr. E. & Mr. B.” Lincoln recognized he was in a no-win situation, underscored by the “life-long friends” phrase that added another layer to the debates over loyalty that year.¹⁰⁰ Ninian W. Edwards, having read Lincoln’s letter to Baker, was quick to remind the president that their friendship stretched back to the time of Lincoln’s settlement in town. “You speak of your life long friends in Springfield,” Edwards appealed in his letter to Lincoln:

I would like to ask you, if when you were a young man I was not your most devoted friend in more ways than one-- Let Joshua F Speed, your own conscience recollection, and a letter of yours written to me in 1842 before your marriage answer-- Again who was

⁹⁹ Abraham Lincoln to Jesse K. Dubois, et al., May 29, 1863, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

¹⁰⁰ Abraham Lincoln to Edward L. Baker, June 15, 1863, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

it, when it was thought in 1840 that you would not be nominated for the Legislature publicly stated if any one was to be left out -- he (I) should be-- Who was your best friend when -- Baker, John Hardin & yourself were candidates for -- nomination to a seat in Congress-- Again which of the two Butler or myself was your best friend for years after that.¹⁰¹

Edwards and Bailhache – who each expressed regret for putting Lincoln in this dilemma, and urged him to remove them from their respective offices – ultimately retained their commissions but were transferred outside of Springfield.

The Democratic Mass Meeting

When state legislators began making their way back to Springfield in June 1863 for the conclusion of the legislative session, the political temperature in the city had barely cooled. Not helping matters was the current status of the Union Army’s military progress, which was at its lowest point during the war. In the West, where the majority of Illinois’s volunteers were stationed, Northern soldiers had stalled outside of Vicksburg. These troops had tried since December to break through Confederate fortifications surrounding this critical stronghold along the Mississippi River. News from the East was worse. After enduring a devastating defeat against Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia at Fredericksburg in December 1862, Union soldiers under another new commander suffered perhaps an equally demoralizing loss at the Battle of Chancellorsville in early May 1862. “My God! my God!” an exasperated Lincoln reportedly said after learning of this most recent debacle. “What will the country say!”¹⁰²

Lincoln was accurate to worry how the country would accept this news. “One More Unfortunate,” was the headline of a *Register* column on the aftermath of the fight at

¹⁰¹ Ninian W. Edwards to Abraham Lincoln, June 18, 1863, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

¹⁰² James McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction*, Third ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2001). See Chapter Eighteen, quotation found on page 348.

Chancellorsville. “Another ‘experiment’ of the radical military policy has been completed,” and met with yet another shattering setback. Still mindful of the soldiers’ recent discontent with the Democratic leadership during the legislative session, however, the *Register* was quick to lay blame on the leadership and not on those involved in the engagement. “That magnificent army, the pride and wonder of the nation, which marched forth so grandly, so proudly and so hopefully a week ago,” the article read, had been “hurled back, bleeding, shattered and demoralized, thankful only now, that it has escaped utter annihilation.”¹⁰³

The reconvening of the legislature overlapped with another noteworthy political event also close to home. One day before the session reopened the Commander of the Northwest, General Ambrose Burnside, issued an order suppressing the *Chicago Times* due to its “repeated expression of disloyal and incendiary sentiment” against the war.¹⁰⁴ Reaction against Burnside’s order was swift. One of the first actions the Democratic majority took in the State House was condemning the general’s actions.¹⁰⁵ The event also created a buzz outside the Capitol building. Orville Browning, the former Illinois senator from Quincy who had recently finished serving out Stephen A. Douglas’s unexpired term, was in Springfield at the time of the incident. He recorded in his diary that most individuals in the city he encountered considered the order a “despotic and unwarrantable thing” that could “produce civil war in the State.”¹⁰⁶ Even Lincoln’s order overriding Burnside’s action days later created “intense excitement” in Springfield, Governor Yates informed Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. These episodes, coupled with the arrest in early

¹⁰³ *Daily Illinois State Register*, May 8, 1863.

¹⁰⁴ J. M. Hofer, "Development of the Peace Movement in Illinois During the Civil War," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 24, no. 1 (1931): 120.

¹⁰⁵ *Resolutions Concerning Suppression of the Chicago Times*, Illinois Legislature, June 4, 1863, Lincoln Papers, LOC.

¹⁰⁶ Theodore Calvin Pease and James G. Randall, eds., *The Diary of Orville Hickman Browning*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Historical Library, 1925), 632.

May of the country's most notorious Copperhead, Ohio Congressman Clement Vallandigham, added to Democratic protests that the Lincoln and Yates administrations were simply taking advantage of the war's poor progress in their pursuit to eliminate all forms of opposition.¹⁰⁷ It also set the stage for another tense month in the capital city.

This was the background as the Illinois General Assembly reconvened after a three-and-a-half-month recess. Even though it was the state capital, Springfielders had grown accustomed to political developments dwarfing other local matters during certain periods of the year: through the election season stretching from the late summer months to November, and every two years when the legislature was in session from January to March. The presence of state congressional and party leaders in June that year caught some in the city off-guard. "Our town is full of strangers," Mercy Conkling observed, "copperheads largely in the majority, boldly expressing their disloyalty, and plotting treason."¹⁰⁸ Governor Yates prepared for this likely scenario back in March when he again asked Lincoln to send four regiments of battle-tested soldiers to Springfield "under the pretext of recruiting" to help disperse the two unruly houses, if it came to that. Lincoln again declined the governor's request, still unconvinced that such fear was warranted. Yates and his closest Republican allies began considering other options as the session recommenced.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Richard Yates to Edwin Stanton, June 15, 1863, Yates Collection, ALPLM; Some of Lincoln's friends in Springfield championed efforts to silence Vallandigham, whom they considered the most recognizable Copperhead in the North. "Stand firm in the Vallandigham case," they wrote Lincoln, assuring the president that "the country will sustain you." William Butler, Richard Yates, Ozias M. Hatch, and Jesse K. Dubois to Abraham Lincoln, June 13, 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁰⁸ Mercy Conkling to Clinton Conkling, June 7, 1863, Conkling Family Collection, ALPLM.

¹⁰⁹ William Butler, O. M. Hatch, Jesse K. Dubois, and Richard Yates to Abraham Lincoln, March 1, 1863, Yates Collection, ALPLM; As Jack Nortrup described the event, Lincoln "answered the request for four regiments with a joke that could not be repeated." See Nortrup, "Yates, the Prorogued Legislature, and the Constitutional Convention," 29-30.

Their answer came shortly after legislative members retook their seats. Six days after the legislature's formal condemnation of Burnside's order, Governor Yates took the rare and controversial step of proroguing the two bodies. The episode occurred on a parliamentary technicality when the House and the Senate failed to agree on a date of adjournment. When this happened, the state constitution permitted the executive authority to determine a time. Once Yates and his advisors recognized this discrepancy, the governor made his decision to dissolve the two houses on June 10, one week after the session resumed, thus suspending all legislative action until 1865. Democrats in the two bodies objected to the order but eventually departed once they understood they had been outmaneuvered.¹¹⁰ No longer would Yates concern himself with a Democratically-controlled state congress for the rest of this term.

Prohibiting Democratic lawmakers from pursuing their agenda may have salvaged Yates's official status as governor, but the step did little to curtail the growing weight of public opinion against him and his party at this point in the war, especially with the upcoming Democratic Mass Meeting scheduled to meet in Springfield on June 17. Illinois Democrats maintained their protests against the governor's action after their reluctant exit from the State House, even appealing to the State Supreme Court to reverse the order, but to no avail. Republicans in the state, on the other hand, expressed mixed emotions over the move. Illinois Secretary of State Ozias M. Hatch defended Yates's decision, considering that the two bodies "contemplated only mischief" while in session. "Hurrah for the governor" was the reaction from a soldier once the news reached Camp Butler. Others, however, worried that the episode might backfire with the looming Democratic convention coming to town. James C. Conkling believed Democrats would simply add the prorogued legislature to their growing list of complaints against

¹¹⁰ Richard Yates to Allen Fuller, June 10, 1863, Yates Collection, ALPLM; *ibid*, 31-32.

Yates, Lincoln, and the Republican Party. The event, Conkling said, would “cause the [Democratic] Convention to pour out upon him [Yates] the vials of their wrath.” Stationed in the South, General John M. Palmer received news of the controversial political developments back home from his wife as well as her fear that Copperheads would likely seek vengeance in some form during the mass meeting. “You have no idea how bold and reckless they are,” she wrote to her husband. “They will have a great time at Springfield on next Wednesday.”¹¹¹

Democrats were indeed emboldened, prorogued legislature or not, on the eve of the party’s statewide gathering. Party leaders in Illinois began preparations in May for a mass rally that would line up with the resumption of the legislative session. Conventions typically occurred late in the summer in an effort to build momentum heading into the fall election season; but feeling the political winds at their back, Democratic leaders wasted no time hoping to exploit their advantage. Yet leadership wanted to demonstrate that resentment against the direction of the war was widespread, and not even the president’s hometown was immune. In its May 28 announcement for a mass meeting, the Democratic State Committee appealed to all party members across the state: “Let the democratic people come . . . and, in general democratic reunion, send forth to the country the opinions and the wishes of the Illinois democracy in regard to the dangers which environ the Constitution and the Union, bequeathed to us, as sacred trusts, by our fathers.”¹¹² Not even the governor’s obscure parliamentary measure could restrain the enthusiasm many Democrats had – or withstand the fears of many Springfield Republicans – heading into the June 17 affair.

¹¹¹ Ozias M. Hatch to James F. Dunn, July 21, 1863, Ozias M. Hatch Collection; William R. Wyllie to “Wife,” June 16, 1863, Wyllie Collection; James C. Conkling to Clinton Conkling, June 15, 1863, Conkling Family Collection, ALPLM; George Thomas Palmer, *A Conscientious Turncoat: The Story of John M. Palmer, 1817-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), 86.

¹¹² *Daily Illinois State Register*, May 30, 1863.

Springfield prepared for one of the largest demonstrations staged in the city, at least since Lincoln's presidential nomination in the summer of 1860. Most available accounts of the event come from Republicans and supporters of the war, and their mood heading into it can be summed up in one word: fear. James and Mercy Conkling explained their apprehensiveness in separate letters to their son Clinton attending Yale. Mercy wrote that "union loving citizens" in town were anxious and she hoped that the Democrats' "own wicked designs will defeat their purpose of evil." James was more specific – and a bit more optimistic – in his concerns, predicting "there will be thousands here armed with pistols knives &c but I do not apprehend anything except from drunken brawls. I hope the day will pass away without disturbance but judging from what occurred at Indianapolis, there may be some difficulty."¹¹³ One day before the convention, law enforcement responded to complaints that some groups near Springfield had "hurrahed for Jeff Davis and also god damned Lincoln to hell."¹¹⁴ This unlikely softened the unease of Republican supporters such as the Conklings.

Governor Richard Yates shared concerns that the large gathering of Democrats might cause a commotion, so he ordered soldiers from Camp Butler be situated around Springfield for the duration of the event. Because he feared the mass meeting might produce a "revolution in our midst," Yates informed Secretary of War Edwin Stanton that Illinois was unable to commit any additional troops until after the convention concluded. In particular, Yates and others worried

¹¹³ Mercy Conkling to Clinton Conkling, June 7, 16 1863; James C. Conkling to Clinton Conkling, June 15, 1863, Conkling Family Collection, ALPLM. In May 1863, armed soldiers disrupted a Democratic mass meeting in Indianapolis after rumors began floating that the Knights of the Golden Circle planned to hijack the proceedings and, according to historian Kenneth Stampp, "convert the convention into a revolutionary uprising." Army volunteers and inebriated participants scuffled throughout the day, and likely the only thing preventing the episode from escalating into a very bloody affair was intervention from military leaders calling back their troops. See Kenneth M. Stampp, *Indiana Politics During the Civil War* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1949), 199-202.

¹¹⁴ James M. Barger, Justice of the Peace, State of Illinois, June 16, 1863, Sangamon County Affidavits Collection, ALPLM.

about protecting the city arsenal from rogue behavior. So as to prevent any weaponry theft or violence from taking place near the armory, commanders positioned soldiers inside and around the structure days before the Democratic gathering.¹¹⁵ William R. Wyllie, a volunteer in the 58th Illinois Infantry stationed at Camp Butler at the time, was one of the soldiers ordered to guard the arsenal. In his diary and letters to his wife during this period, Wyllie gladly accepted his duty inside the arsenal, especially as a platform “to pounce upon the Home rebels ... if they should think that they can do as they please with their sayings & doings.” The cramped space he shared with other men was less than ideal, as was sleeping on boxes containing ammunition and muskets that served as their bunks.¹¹⁶ But Wyllie genuinely thought the sacrifices worthwhile.

Still irritated with the state Democratic legislature’s efforts to negotiate an end to the war, thus prohibiting soldiers from completing the task that compelled them to enlist in 1861 and 1862, Wyllie and veterans like him delighted in the prospect of encountering the so-called “fire in the rear.” Wyllie especially reviled the “rascally set of fellows” charged with coordinating the gathering that championed Copperhead attitudes. He described the upcoming event as the “Copperhead pow-wow,” the “Grand Copperhead Convention,” and the “monster mass meeting.” He also hated seeing the worst features of the peace party pollute the “natural appearances of our Prairie State.” Wyllie and his infantry companions were prepared, if necessary, to face this new enemy on the field of battle in the heart of Springfield.¹¹⁷

It never came to that. Everything went smoothly, according to Wyllie and others. Reports that a small branch of the Sons of Liberty formed during the gathering caused little alarm in the

¹¹⁵ Richard Yates to Edwin Stanton, June 15, 1863, Yates Collection, ALPLM; Mercy Conkling to Clinton Conkling, June 16, 1863, Conkling Family Collection, ALPLM.

¹¹⁶ Diary of William R. Wyllie, June 16, 1863, William Wyllie Collection, ALPLM.

¹¹⁷ Diary of William R. Wyllie, June 15, 16, 1863, William Wyllie Collection, ALPLM; William R. Wyllie to “Wife,” June 16, 1863, William Wyllie Collection, ALPLM.

area, especially as convention leaders repeatedly distanced the party from violence and conspiracy societies.¹¹⁸ The only controversy was over the number in attendance. The Republican *Journal* estimated that 15,000 attended, a respectable but still diminutive figure compared with the *Register*'s mark of 75,000 to 100,000 visitors. Springfield teenage Democratic supporter Anna Ridgely enjoyed her time at the event, "but I hardly think there were so many" as 75,000 in town.¹¹⁹ Nonetheless, the fact remains that a large number of Illinoisans braved the warm June weather and trekked to the state's capital – the home of Lincoln – to express their mutual dissatisfaction with the current direction of the war.

On the day of the convention, visitors listened to prominent Democratic figures speak from any of the six platforms at the fairgrounds. At the main stage, convention leaders passed two-dozen resolutions denouncing Republican actions that infringed upon the Constitution. They listed numerous rights that Lincoln and his party had allegedly trampled upon, with an emphasis on freedom of speech and freedom from unwarranted searches and seizures, both direct references to the recent suppression of the *Chicago Times* and the arrest of former Ohio Congressman Clement Vallandigham. One resolution stressed each state's ability to govern itself as well as crimes committed within its jurisdiction, while another declared that martial law only pertained to areas where "civil law is utterly powerless." These two resolutions hinted at the controversy still lingering from the Dustin case in Springfield two months earlier. Another resolution condemned Yates's recent "usurpation" of power by proroguing the state general assembly.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ William R. Wyllie to "Wife," June 18, 1863, Wyllie Collection, ALPLM; Stamp, *Indiana Politics During the Civil War*, 199-202.

¹¹⁹ Klement, "Copperhead Secret Societies," 166-167.

¹²⁰ *Daily Illinois State Register*, June 18, 1863.

The last three resolutions underscored the Illinois Democracy's unending effort at defining a loyal citizen and demonstrating that its party matched that description better than its opponents. These resolutions distinguished the Northern Democratic position apart from the ideologies embraced by Republicans and by Southerners who broke from the Union and formed their own nation. Illinois Democrats denounced secession and urged the departed states to lay down their arms and rejoin the United States. Before accomplishing that, however, they recognized the need to placate their Southern countrymen. They therefore passed a resolution pressing for a constitutional amendment protecting the rights of all states and restoring the Union "as it was." Slavery was never mentioned in this specific resolution, merely implied. Turning their wrath toward Republicans in the North, convention leaders blamed them for the current "misrule and anarchy" in the party's determination "to subvert the constitution and the government." In their final resolution, Democrats demanded that President Lincoln withdraw his "Proclamation of Emancipation," if for no other reason than to respect the soldiers who went off to fight "only for the 'Union, the constitution, and the enforcement of the laws.'"¹²¹

To Democrats, the meeting had been a colossal success. Participants believed they had delivered their message in the most expedient and peaceful ways imaginable. The convention "was the most tremendous gathering of the people ever witnessed in Illinois, or in the Union," boasted the *Register* the following day. "Such perfect order in a crowd so vast, was never before witnessed." The evening after the major festivities had ended, attendees either began their journey home or stuck around town. Some made their way over to Virgil Hickox's estate for additional speeches. Others congregated near the Capitol building and listened to brass bands perform while enjoying the nighttime fireworks. Democrats and their supporters left the

¹²¹ A detailed list of the day's events, including the resolutions passed by the convention, can be found in the *Daily Illinois State Register*, June 18, 1863.

fairgrounds that day believing the event was the turning point in the war they had long coveted.¹²²

Conclusion

That promise would be short-lived. In the weeks following the mass meeting, a succession of extraordinary regional and national developments removed the rally from collective discourse in a relatively brief period. The first involved reports of an assassination attempt on Governor Richard Yates. Whether true or not, Yates earned sympathy from the incident following the most distressing year of his administration. When the soldiers of the 122nd Illinois Infantry stationed in Tennessee learned of the episode, one veteran responded that if the plot had succeeded, “[General Ulysses] Grant could not have prompted his army from going to Ill[inoi]s and Killing Every Copperhead in the State. The Governor is the Idol of the Soldiers they love him next to their ‘wives.’”¹²³ Additional rumors surfaced in the gathering’s aftermath, such as increased Knights of the Golden Circle sightings and other clandestine groups plotting to overthrow the Illinois capital. In the fall, an allegation circulated that William Quantrill, the infamous Missouri bushwhacker, attended the Springfield Democratic convention before preparing his attacks in Kansas.¹²⁴

Far more damaging for the Springfield – and Northern – Democracy was encouraging news from two military fronts in July 1863, Gettysburg and Vicksburg. The political and emotional impact of these outcomes in the city will be discussed in chapter five. But in short, the

¹²² *Daily Illinois State Register*, June 18, 1863.

¹²³ James F. Drish to Wife, July 10, 1863, James F. Drish Collection, ALPLM; One supporter from New York congratulated Yates on the governor’s “happy escape.” See Henry Rice to Richard Yates, July 3, 1863, Yates Collection, ALPLM.

¹²⁴ Corneau, "A Girl in the Sixties," 427.

results from these battles made anyone still claiming the war was hopeless and unwinnable look foolish. Historians refer to the Battle of Gettysburg as the “high-tide” of the Confederacy, the closest its armies came toward winning the war. One could argue that the Illinois Democratic Party reached its “high-tide” at the mass meeting in Springfield two-and-a-half weeks earlier. Yet as with the Confederate military, all of the momentum gained during the first half of 1863 was undone by Union Armies in early July. And not just Democratic condemnations of the war’s poor prospects; their denunciations of emancipation also lost ground as Republicans increasingly accepted abolition as good military policy that benefitted soldiers in the field. Democrats in Springfield would again benefit from Union military setbacks in 1864 as many began wondering if the war might ever end, and the party was optimistic about its chances just ahead of that year’s presidential election. But its strength was never the same as it was before those historic military victories in July 1863, a period when the Home of Lincoln was anything but loyal to the president, and Springfield resembled nothing like the community anticipating the dead remains of its “Savior of the Union” two years later.

CHAPTER FIVE:
“THREE CHEERS FOR OLD ABE”:
EMANCIPATION, WAR, AND THE 1864 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Democrats in Springfield, as in other parts of the North, exploited the political fallout over emancipation and racial anxiety in the war's first two years, accusing the Lincoln and Yates administrations of abusing their authority by passing legislation that, they asserted, was unrelated to the fighting. They benefitted from this tactic in the November 1861 and November 1862 elections because Republicans also struggled finding common ground on emancipation, and Democratic state lawmakers railed against the Emancipation Proclamation during the 1863 legislative session in the city Abraham Lincoln called home. Most Democrats in town still backed war against the rebellion, but they believed these new developments touching on slavery went too far. As this chapter argues, however, the Republican split over emancipation waned over the course of 1863, uniting the local party heading into the following year's presidential campaign.

By then, however, the status of the Union's overall military affairs was bleak, and Springfield Democrats shifted their fury toward Republican mismanagement of the war, leading to one the bitterest and highly contested campaigns in the town's history. While Lincoln and his party won rather handily across the North and in Illinois, the former Springfield resident barely won his hometown against a presidential candidate with few ties to the Prairie State. The election results revealed that Springfield's overall impression of Lincoln was just as mixed as it was four years ago, if not more so. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion on what the campaign's results meant for Illinois's black population. Even though race was not the campaign wedge issue it was two years earlier, the 1864 election's aftermath meant significant changes for the state's African Americans.

Accepting Emancipation

Republicans in Springfield, as with the national party as a whole, struggled with the debate over emancipation during the war's first two years. Members fell into one of two camps: radicals who had demanded abolition for years, if not decades, and moderates who worried over the consequences of such a revolutionary measure. The latter faction was especially concerned that formerly enslaved blacks would migrate to Illinois and steal jobs from whites, an unattractive prospect for a majority of Northerners at the time. Democrats recognized this split amongst their rivals and used it to their advantage by campaigning against the abolition of slavery and black immigration in the local 1861 and 1862 elections, winning on both occasions.

Republicans only gained momentum when Union military victories pushed emancipation off the front page. Otherwise, they could expect to endure further setbacks at the ballot box. By the time the two parties began preparing for next year's presidential election, however, emancipation no longer divided local Republicans. Over a roughly six-month timeframe, in a three-phase process, Springfield Republicans gradually accepted Lincoln's logic just before signing the Emancipation Proclamation into law: "We know how to save the Union.... In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free—honorable alike in what we give, and what we preserve." The options were becoming clear. "We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last, best hope of earth."¹

¹ Donald, *Lincoln*, 398.

The Soldier Defense

Illinois soldiers initiated this process of growing universal Republican acceptance toward emancipation. As demonstrated in chapter three, the 1863 legislative session was one of the most partisan in the state's history with Democratic majorities in both houses of the Illinois legislature that year. The session opened the same week President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation into law, and Democratic legislators denounced it instantly and often, providing a preview of their party's platform. Illinois soldiers, with time on their hands during the inactive winter months, kept up with political developments back home. They read with disgust that Democratic legislators expressed antiwar sentiments and demanded Illinois's withdrawal from the war. Soldiers responded by threatening to leave their Southern posts, march back to Springfield and resolve this meddlesome element, then return south to complete their primary mission. Republican supporters in Illinois's capital city read these letters in the Republican *State Journal* with delight, but the soldiers' correspondence revealed another important detail: these volunteers defended the Emancipation Proclamation and claimed it made their task easier.

Like many Northerners, several soldiers criticized the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation issued in September 1862. But unlike civilians on the home front these veterans had an easier time appreciating the measure's wartime connection. Robert B. Latham, a soldier from Lincoln, roughly thirty miles northeast of Springfield, expressed his support of the "proclamation" as "the way to put down the rebellion, and end the war, and that is what I am for. It is worse than folly to talk about compromise now."² After it went into effect, debates between Union soldiers in camps across the South over the Emancipation Proclamation more or less disappeared. Some even argued that the measure unified Northern troops. James W. Dodds, a

² R. B. Latham to Wife, January 22, 1863, R. B. Latham Collection, ALPLM.

volunteer from Chatham Township just outside the Springfield city limits, scoffed at the notion that emancipation divided the army. “Some letters have been written back to the [Democratic *Illinois State*] Register stating that the soldiers were on the point of laying down their arms on account of the Proclamation[.] That is all untrue. The army was never more united than now. They are all of one mind.”³ Another soldier with the initials J. C. S. expressed similar sentiments about the men in his regiment that mostly hailed from Sangamon County. “If the Union were as firmly united as the 114th Illinois is on the President’s Proclamation, it would never sever. The regiment felt splendidly after reading the proclamation,” he wrote to the editors of the *Illinois State Journal*, “but when they found that traitors were at work to ruin their homes in Illinois, it made them feel sad. To go home and clean out ‘traitors’ is the desire of the 114th now.”⁴ One volunteer was surprised by his regiment’s acceptance of emancipation. “The President’s proclamation was received in camp this evening,” he admitted in a letter back home to the *Springfield Journal*, and “the general expression is ‘Bully for Old Abe!’” He was convinced this “will prove the hardest blow the rebellion has yet received.”⁵

Alternatively, some soldiers’ attitudes changed after witnessing slavery firsthand. Accepting emancipation did not translate to favoring equal rights for blacks. Troops from the Prairie State were as likely to express anti-Negro sentiments as they were to applaud the end of slavery, as David Wallace Adams has proven.⁶ For instance, one soldier supported the idea of enlisting black soldiers into the army since it ultimately offered him a better chance of survival. “I am truly glad that they are arming Negroes[,] they are none too good to fight for me, or to die

³ James W. Dodds to Miss Lake, March 18, 1863, John Lindsey Harris Collection, ALPLM.

⁴ J. C. S. to “Editors Journal,” January 14, 1863, found in *Daily Illinois State Journal*, January 27, 1863.

⁵ William A. Mallory to “Editors Journal,” found in *Daily Illinois State Journal*, January 21, 1863.

⁶ David Wallace Adams, “Illinois Soldiers and the Emancipation Proclamation,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (1908-1984)* 67, no. 4 (1974): 418.

for me, or rather instead of me, if necessary.”⁷ The counter to that view came from Alvin S. French, a Springfield resident who served as surgeon for the 114th Illinois, who expressed his attitudes on slavery to a longtime friend back home:

I honestly and sincerely believe that the inhuman traffic in flesh and blood, called slavery, has received its death blow; and for the reason that it is in the way of, and an obstacle to, the establishment of the federal power in the rebel states, that it is in antagonism with every principle of justice—humanity and liberty; and as long as there remains a vestige of this evil in the land endangering the very life of the republic, and giving a foundation and chief cornerstone to a rebel government *let the war go on!* Spread desolation *everywhere*; let us all *die* or linger out a miserable existence, *crippled*—broken down in constitution—and even shut up in dungeons, rather than sacrifice our country and its honor on the altar of so deep, dark and damning an institution.⁸

But equality was not the purpose of these letters home. Soldiers questioned the commitment of loved ones and political leaders back in Illinois, prompting this letter-writing campaign from enraged regiments in early 1863. They sometimes sent copies of their correspondence to like-minded individuals, especially Republican leaders in Springfield and Washington, including President Lincoln. More importantly, for the Republican Party at least, these letters made their way to the *State Journal* wherein the editor published them – often on the front page, a space typically reserved for advertisements or breaking headlines – getting the soldiers’ message out to a wider audience. The *Journal* tried to establish the soldiers’ endorsement of the Republican Party by printing them.

This was the first phase in Republican acceptance of emancipation in Springfield. The problem for the party, however, was that reports from the battlefield that spring overshadowed everything else. With the state legislature in session and Illinois soldiers conveying their frustrations with its actions, Confederate armies under the command of Robert E. Lee won a

⁷ John L. Harris to Susan, May 2, 1863, John L. Harris Collection, ALPLM.

⁸ A. S. French to David W. Harrower, April 6, 1863, *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, vol. 15, No. 1 (April 1922): 531-534.

string of military victories in the East, concluding with one of their biggest triumphs at Chancellorsville. These Union setbacks dominated newspaper headlines and demoralized Northern supporters of the war. The defeats also contradicted assertions that emancipation was a useful wartime measure. Democrats basked in the growing resentment toward emancipation and the war, peaking with the party's mass meeting held in Springfield in June 1863 described in chapter three. Republicans, unable to offer an acceptable rebuttal, waited anxiously for any sign of good news from the war, their proverbial last line of defense.

“The People Are Perfectly Wild”: The 1863 Summer

They had to wait more than two weeks after their rivals' mass rally. But when it came, an enormous sense of relief spread throughout town. Before the monumental victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, Northerners confronted the onslaught of discouraging news coming from their armies in the first part of 1863. Grant's army had remained stalled outside Vicksburg since the winter and Union troops fighting in the East suffered multiple defeats under a rotating command structure. Some of the biggest complaints came from soldiers in the area. In early May, John L. Harris, a soldier in the 14th Illinois Infantry stationed in Springfield, wrote that he “don't much like the maner in which the war is conducted,” adding, “the policy is good enough, but there is a lack of energy in prosecuting it.”⁹ Over at Camp Butler, William Wyllie vented his frustration over lack of progress in the Western theater, a region that had been a source of inspiration for Northerners in the war's first two years. “The Gen[eral]s. of the Western Army have got into the way they have of doing in the Army of the Potomac, a way of not doing anything. They have made several ineffectual attempts to take Vicksburg.... The rebels remain unmolested masters of

⁹ John L. Harris to Susan, May 2, 1863, John L. Harris Collection, ALPLM.

the country.”¹⁰ In late May, organizers began preparing celebrations in town after hearing Grant had finally taken Vicksburg. Hours later they learned those reports were false.¹¹ When actual word of potential Union battles reached residents on July 4, they still waited for confirmed reports because “people has been decieved so often,” John Edward Young penned in his diary the day Vicksburg fell under Union control. “[T]hey are slow to believe the reports now.”¹²

On July 7th, excitement roared throughout the city. That morning, news that Northern armies had successfully fended off an invasion from General Robert E. Lee’s troops in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania four days earlier reached town. But it was reports from Vicksburg one hour later that consumed the Springfield community.¹³ Since the beginning of the year, citizens had followed the developments of Illinois soldiers (including many Springfield volunteers) stationed along the Mississippi River near the Confederate holdout at Vicksburg. Residents therefore felt a deeper connection with this military victory than others. John Edward Young best described Springfield’s reaction: “General Mead has defeated the rebbles at Gettiesburg Pennsylvania after a terrible battle. Rosecrans has driven Bragg out of Tennessee,” but “last and best of all Grant has taken Vicksburg. The people are perfectly wild with joy at these events.”¹⁴ Even the anti-administration *Register* described Vicksburg’s capture as “the most important triumph of the war.”¹⁵

The next day, July 8, city organizers threw an impromptu “Grand Union Demonstration” around the Capitol building. Individuals from the city and the countryside braved the blistering

¹⁰ William R. Wyllie to “Wife,” April 20, 1863, William Wyllie Collection, ALPLM.

¹¹ Mercy Conkling to Clinton Conkling, May 26, 1863, Conkling Family Collection, ALPLM.

¹² “An Illinois Farmer during the Civil War,” 106.

¹³ Angle, *Here I Have Lived*, 279-280.

¹⁴ “An Illinois Farmer during the Civil War,” 106-107.

¹⁵ Quinn, “Lincoln’s Springfield in the Civil War,” 49.

summer heat to celebrate as a community. The crowds increased throughout the day and into the evening and witnessed gun-salutes, bonfires, and listened to patriotic speeches. John Harper, a soldier who had spent time in Vicksburg earlier that year, enjoyed the festivities in town. He would have preferred to celebrate with his fellow fighters down in Mississippi, but Springfield was a fine substitute. He told his sister of the “jollification” throughout the city. “Nearly every house was brilliantly illuminated and the streets was never known to be crowded so it was allmost impossible for one to try to pass through there.” Yet the “Grand Union Demonstration” had a peculiarly Republican feel to it, and administration supporters did not take long turning the event into a political rally. In addition to the town’s jovial environment, Harper added in the letter to his sister, “I tell you Copperheadism was on the discount that night.” Any harmony produced between the two political parties in Springfield from the momentous military victories that summer quickly evaporated. The partisanship that year, it turns out, was too strong to overcome.¹⁶

Verbal attacks against Democrats – Copperheads in particular – escalated in the following weeks, especially from vindicated soldiers. One Illinois soldier still stationed at Vicksburg had a warning for those advocating peace back home. “We want to let the Copperheads of the North see that we are able to crush this rebellion without their assistance and when we go home we will crush them to so I would advise them to turn into the Union and stay in and give up the fooling.” This was a sincere – and prophetic – threat with three-year veterans set to receive their furloughs home beginning in early 1864, explained in chapter two. Another soldier, writing on behalf of Illinois volunteers fighting in the South, reaffirmed his fellow soldiers’ commitment to the war. More than two years of fighting had made these men appreciate

¹⁶ John Harper to “Sister,” July 10, 1863, John and Alexander Harper Collection, ALPLM; Richard Yates to Ozias M. Hatch, July 20, 1863, Ozias M. Hatch Collection, ALPLM.

the state of affairs back home in the North. After rushing “to the support of our national flag, and in bearing it proudly, and triumphantly through all dangers of field and flood,” he explained in his letter to Governor Yates, we “have learned to love it better and to value the free institutions it protects the higher, as we contrast them with the effect of the institution of Slavery, the declared foundation of this monstrosity bearing the title of Confederate government.” “We have been told that the war must cease, that the Union never can be restored by fighting,” he continued, demonstrating his grasp of the Northern political landscape, “but we the soldiers of Illinois have declared in all confidence, and in all earnestness that The Federal Union must and shall be preserved.”¹⁷

The Grand Union Mass Meeting

While Illinois soldiers used the victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg to reaffirm their commitment to defeating the Confederacy, state and local Republicans used the outcomes to build momentum for the party. Still humiliated by the large turnout of the Democratic Mass Meeting in June, some leaders suggested holding a single rally that would trump their rivals’ affair. Others recommended smaller pro-war gatherings across the state to reach distant and isolated voters. The party tried this latter approach in late July and early August, but the events failed to attract many visitors. Republicans conceded that the Democratic meeting had been effective, and they hoped to mimic their opponents’ success, so they opted to hold their own massive demonstration in Illinois’s capital city. All Union supporters were invited, regardless of

¹⁷ Herman Schneideryan to Richard Yates, August 18, 1863; David Gamble to Richard Yates, August 25, 1863, Yates Collection, ALPLM.

political affiliation. Local Republicans eagerly awaited the event because they wanted to demonstrate that Springfield's loyalty was to Lincoln and the Union, not their rivals.¹⁸

The first announcement for the 1863 "Great Union Mass Meeting" appeared in the August 13 edition of the *Journal*, scheduled for September 3. Reports of the meeting reached the soldiers of the 66th Illinois Infantry stationed in Corinth, Mississippi. Though unable to attend, the men in camp read "with the highest satisfaction the call for a Mass convention to advocate a more vigorous prosecution of the war to be held at Springfield."¹⁹ Far more exciting, however, were reports that Lincoln might make an appearance. On August 14, James C. Conkling wrote to his friend in the White House requesting the president's presence at the Springfield meeting. Conkling informed Lincoln, "It would be gratifying to the many thousands who will be present on that occasion if you would also meet with them." Conkling encouraged his friend to consider taking a reprieve from the confines of Washington by visiting the friendly atmosphere of his hometown, as well as "break away from the pressure of public duties." A long list of esteemed guests had been invited to attend and speak, but Conkling knew "that nothing could add more to the interest of the occasion than your presence."²⁰

For a brief period, the president's visit seemed possible, even to Lincoln. After receiving Conkling's invitation, Lincoln returned a message by telegraph that read, "I think I will go, or send a letter—probably the latter."²¹ A headline in the next day's edition of the *Journal* read: "President Lincoln Will Probably Be Here." "Nothing could be more fitting ... in this hour of national triumph and hope, than that he should visit his old home and receive the greetings of his

¹⁸ Allen C. Guelzo, "Defending Emancipation: Abraham Lincoln and the Conkling Letter, 1863," *Civil War History* 48, no. 4 (2002): 322.

¹⁹ David C. Gamble to Richard Yates, August 25, 1863, Yates Collection, ALPLM.

²⁰ James C. Conkling to Abraham Lincoln, August 14, 1863, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

²¹ Abraham Lincoln to James C. Conkling, August 20, 1863, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

friends of the Prairie State,” the *Journal* wrote.²² Shortly after receiving Lincoln’s telegraph, Conkling sent a follow-up letter with additional appeals for the president’s attendance. He again urged Lincoln to consider the healthy benefits of visiting home, but Conkling also hinted that Lincoln’s presence would help “increase party strength and influence.”²³

Lincoln almost committed, having attended similar meetings around Washington during the war, and he asked Herndon’s thoughts over making the trip. Herndon echoed many of the points made by Conkling, saying, “We will have a great time here on the 3d [of] Sept[embe]r and it is thought it will be the largest crowd ever Convened here.” Herndon, like the rest of the party, wanted a large gathering, and Lincoln’s attendance would give Republicans and their supporters “confidence, back-bone vigor & energy.” Herndon also warned Lincoln that the event might attract troublemakers, but the president could take solace in the fact that “Union men are busy at work all over the State to meet any emergency.”²⁴

Lincoln sent a letter after all, intended to be read at the meeting. The president had made up his mind to stay in Washington even before receiving Herndon’s letter. But news of the president’s absence, which spread in the days before the event, did not deter the thousands of visitors from across the Midwest who made the trek to Springfield.²⁵ Instead, they came to listen

²² *Daily Illinois State Journal*, August 21, 1863.

²³ James C. Conkling to Abraham Lincoln, August 21, 1863, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

²⁴ William H. Herndon to Abraham Lincoln, August 29, 1863, Lincoln Collection, LOC; Guelzo, "Defending Emancipation," 325.

²⁵ Democratic supporter Anna Ridgely spent the day indoors but noticed the large contingent of “country people” in town for the event. See Corneau, "A Girl in the Sixties," 429. In 1866, James C. Conkling predicted Lincoln would decline the invitation, “but we hoped to receive some communication which would indicate his future policy and give encouragement to his friends. We were not disappointed. In his answer he replies, not to any objections which had been made by his friends, but to the caviling and criticisms of those who, without being open and undisguised traitors, were continually assailing the administration by clamoring for peace and endeavoring to weaken the confidence of the people in wisdom of his policy and the propriety of his Proclamation of Emancipation.” See Clinton L. Conkling, “Historical Data Concerning the Second Presbyterian Church of Springfield Illinois,” typescript, vol. 2, Second Presbyterian Church, 1917, 289-290.

to the featured letter. The *Journal*, obviously excited about the prospects of the event, proudly announced, "Every house in the city, in which a Union family resides, is full to overflowing. Some of our leading citizens are boarding and sleeping more than fifty to one hundred people." The newspaper estimated that 200,000 people attended the meeting, while the Democratic *Register* put the figure closer to twelve thousand.²⁶

Activities began at nine o'clock on the morning of September 3, and rally-goers congregated near one of the five stands throughout the fairgrounds. They heard speakers and listened to letters sent by notable figures also unable to attend, such as Massachusetts's Edward Everett and Indiana's Schuyler Colfax. But the president's letter was the main attraction. Lincoln sent instructions along with the letter, advising Conkling to read it slowly to the crowd. However, since Lincoln had addressed the letter to his friend, someone impersonating the President read it to Conkling who sat on a chair atop the main stage.²⁷

The letter was Lincoln's fiercest defense of emancipation thus far. Even though Lincoln expected a sympathetic crowd in Springfield, he wanted to reach a larger audience than just the group of loyal men and women in his old hometown. He challenged anti-emancipation Democrats to consider another alternative to ending the war. "You desire peace; and you blame me that we do not have it. But how can we attain it?" Lincoln rejected dissolution of the Union as an option, and the Confederacy refused to consider compromise, so that left war as the only alternative. If Northern Democrats accepted military force, then they agreed with Lincoln. He defended the validity of the Emancipation Proclamation, pointing out that it had done no more

²⁶ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, September 4, 1863. One Camp Butler soldier estimated that fifteen thousand people attended the convention. See Alex Harper to Sister, September 6, 1863, John and Alexander Harper Collection, ALPLM. Due to a shortage of lodging options, many in town opened their homes to out-of-town guests. See Mary Brayman to Mason Brayman, August 31, 1863, Bailhache-Brayman Collection, ALPLM.

²⁷ Guelzo, "Defending Emancipation," 326-327.

harm to the progress of the war than before its implementation. He questioned Democratic loyalty to the Union in his defense of emancipation, saying:

You say you will not fight to free negroes. Some of them seem willing to fight for you; but, no matter. Fight you, then exclusively to save the Union. I issued the proclamation on purpose to aid you in saving the Union. Whenever you shall have conquered all resistance to the Union, if I shall urge you to continue fighting, it will be an apt time then for you to declare you will not fight to free negroes.

This was a classic example of Lincoln's logic combined with skilled rhetoric, the clearest defense of emancipation's connection to winning the war. Lincoln ended his letter with an optimistic sketch on the progress of war, noting recent Union successes and expressing his admiration for all men in the service of their country. "Peace does not appear so distant as it did," he wrote hopefully. "I hope it will come soon, and come to stay."²⁸

The meeting continued into the evening with party resolutions, fireworks, and a torchlight parade through the city streets. Attendees hailed the event as a success. Mary Shields enjoyed her visit that day, saying "pretty much all the good union folks that could go was up." Those present hollowed "for the union and for honest Olde Abe."²⁹ Soldiers from Camp Butler attended the mass rally, including one awestruck veteran who left amazed that the large gathering of participants maintained "the best order" he had ever witnessed.³⁰ Lincoln was pleased to hear of the event's success, but he worried over the letter's reception. Anson Miller, a Springfield friend who attended the gathering, calmed Lincoln's fears on a later visit to Washington. Miller informed the President that the crowd "most vehemently cheered" the extract related to emancipation for enslaved blacks. Miller even quoted one particular passage back to Lincoln,

²⁸ Abraham Lincoln to James C. Conkling, August 26, 1863, Lincoln Collection, Library of Congress; For an in-depth analysis of this document, see Allen Guelzo, "Defending Emancipation."

²⁹ Mary Shields to William Funk, September 15(?), 1863, David Blackburn Collection, ALPLM.

³⁰ John L. Harris to Susan, September 21, 1863, John L. Harris Collection, ALPLM.

saying “We have promised the colored men their rights; and, by the help of God, that promise shall be kept.” As a result, Lincoln had helped eliminate any openly lingering Republican dissent over emancipation in Springfield. A relieved Lincoln responded to Miller, “Well, God helping me, that promise shall be fulfilled.”³¹

From that point forward, local Republicans no longer questioned the merits of emancipation during the war, whether they supported the measure or not. During the weary summer of 1864, when Union armies struggled to break through Confederate defenses and the home front was again the scene of heated debates over the war, still rare was the Republican critique of abolitionism uttered in Springfield. Even local Democrats, aware that the issue no longer divided their opponents as it had in 1862, scaled back their emancipation attacks during the 1864 presidential campaign. The primary issue dividing Springfield Republicans in the future was whether to stay the course with their current commander in chief or change direction, described below.

Yet for the time being, the situation in late-1863 looked promising for Republicans in Springfield. The party’s momentum continued into the November elections that year despite the relatively low-profile races. Not even snow nor muddy streets could restrain Republican enthusiasm. “Oh what a rejoicing was had last night over the Great Union victories,” the soldier John Harper described in a letter to his sister, “I tell you old Springfield was alive last night.” Harper lumped local Republican success with the party’s triumphs across the North, claiming, with much hyperbole, “We have gained the [greatest] Victory than has ever been fought yet and the victory gained for us the copperheads have not carried one state yet.”³² Maintaining that

³¹ Moses Coit Tyler, "ONE OF MR. LINCOLN'S OLD FRIENDS," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (1908-1984)* 28, no. 4 (1936): 256-257.

³² John Harper to Sister, November 4, 1863, John and Alexander Harper Collection, ALPLM.

momentum going into the 1864 presidential election proved difficult, however, as the glimmer of hope following the Union army victories at Gettysburg, Vicksburg and elsewhere in 1863 lost its luster.

The Election of 1864

For the first time in four years, no elected body occupied the State House in 1864. Yet owing to that year's presidential campaign, Springfield residents had no reprieve from politics, if they even wanted one. Even without the constant presence of legislators and political aids around town, 1864 may have been the most politically fraught year of the war. That year's presidential election was heavily contested throughout the North, and Springfield embodied the animosity produced by that race. In other ways, however, the campaign in this Illinois community did not encapsulate the experiences of other Northern communities in 1864, and Lincoln's connection had a lot to do with that discrepancy.

Fresh off their 1863 success at the polls, national and local Republicans sought to maintain momentum heading into next year's presidential campaign, but obstacles stood in their way. The summer's historic Union military victories, despite temporarily silencing assertions that the war was a failure or mismanaged, still came at a heavy toll. Another year had elapsed with thousands more Illinois families suffering the loss of a loved one serving in uniform, and many more soldiers having sustained injuries from one more season of fighting. A member of Springfield's Second Presbyterian Church singled out 1863 as the "darkest year of our Civil War," while the farmer John Edward Young described the somber atmosphere that Christmas in the region as such: "The pall of sorrow and mourning rest upon many once happy homes and the

constant remembrance of loved ones now absent and exposed to all the temptations and dangers of war serves to subdue and chasten the gay and exuberant spirit of thousands.”³³

Perhaps one or two more military victories in the coming months would end the war and legitimize Republican claims that their strategy had been correct. But those victories never came. Instead, almost daily Northerners confronted news of Union army setbacks or stalemates that 1864 spring and summer, putting supporters of the administration on the defense before the Republican National Convention. In fact, debate over Lincoln’s viability as a candidate for reelection took place in every Northern community, including the president’s. Some thought he was too soft and should be replaced by a candidate who spared nothing in finishing off the Confederacy. Others argued that Lincoln remained the party’s best chance to defeat a Democratic candidate.³⁴ Their enthusiasm from the latter half of 1863 having worn off, Republicans headed into their party’s national convention that June anxious and divided.

Those Republicans who wanted Lincoln replaced with another candidate were often the same ones who had previously raised concerns over his handling of office. Arguably the most influential individual in Springfield during the war, Governor Richard Yates, had been especially critical of the president after Lincoln reversed General John C. Frémont’s 1861 measure emancipating all slaves in Missouri. Oddly enough, Yates also blamed Lincoln for the party’s setbacks in the 1862 midterm elections, despite many voters’ reluctance to back a policy of emancipation that Yates had spearheaded. Yates softened his tone following the military victories in the summer of 1863, but resumed attacks when Union troops failed to deal a final

³³ Clinton L. Conkling, “Historical Data Concerning the Second Presbyterian Church of Springfield Illinois,” typescript, vol. 1, Second Presbyterian Church, 1917, 142; “An Illinois Farmer during the Civil War,” 109-110.

³⁴ I have relied extensively on Paul Gaylord Hubbard’s dissertation “The Lincoln-McClellan Presidential Election in Illinois” for this section. P.G. Hubbard, “The Lincoln-McClellan Presidential Election in Illinois” (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1949), 12.

blow to rebel armies. Just ahead of the September 1863 Union Mass Meeting in Springfield, the *St. Louis Democrat* reported that a group of frustrated Republicans, under Yates's guidance, attempted to use the setting to rally support for a replacement candidate heading into the presidential election. Yates even broached the subject of nominating someone other than Lincoln to the audience, but was met with stunned silence. After Yates finished, Wisconsin Republican Senator James R. Doolittle reiterated his faith in the president, apparently bringing the crowd to its feet in celebration. Witnessing this reaction, Yates returned to the stage after Doolittle had finished and acknowledged "he was satisfied that the people demanded the re-election of Mr. Lincoln; and that he would do all in his power to aid that result."³⁵

But doubts resurfaced as 1864 opened with little good news coming from the frontlines, and Yates again led the charge from the Illinois Executive Mansion persuading Republicans to change course. As Illinois historian Arthur C. Cole explained, "extensive preparations were reported as going on at Springfield to nominate some other man." Part of Yates's frustration stemmed from his interactions with Washington officials who "has so far refused us arms" despite his multiple appeals. A visitor to Springfield recalled the "abiding confidence in the Patriotism of Mr. Lincoln" expressed throughout town, but also picked up on "certain misgivings in regard to many things connected with his administration." The recipient of this letter, Illinois Senator Lyman Trumbull, had himself sensed lukewarm support from members in his political circles, asserting, "There is distrust of fear that [Lincoln] is too undecided and inefficient to put down the rebellion." Unelected individuals also expressed this view. Fellow Springfielder Thomas J. More, a self-described "uncompromising Union man, none more so," knew Lincoln

³⁵ E. L. Waterman and Duane Mowry, "A Memorable Speech at Springfield and a By-Stander's Account of It," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 2, no. 4 (January 1910): 42-43; Hubbard, "The Lincoln-McClellan Presidential Election in Illinois," 20-21.

intimately but had doubts that his former townsman was up to the task of finishing off the Confederacy. “Lincoln and many others high in authority are quite too angelic for this devilish rebellion. We need more of the spirit of Andrew Jackson in our men in high places,” he declared. It was therefore necessary to change course, and More knew “of no Union man who does not agree with me on this point.” Another fellow Springfielder, Erastus Wright, still had faith in his “old neighbor Father Abraham,” though acknowledged that many of the president’s local “*best friends* have their feelings alienated and wounded by his sympathy with slavery, as though there was any goodness in so godless a wretch as a slaveholder.”³⁶

Others remained steadfast. Springfield’s Republican *State Journal* never wavered in its commitment to Lincoln, maintaining communication with the White House during the campaign, and backing Lincoln’s candidacy for reelection, to which an appreciative Lincoln responded in June that year that, “The Journal paper was always my friend; and of course its editors the same.”³⁷ Springfield’s Union League resolved in December 1863 that their choice for president was Lincoln, “the honest patriot, the sagacious statesman, the pure philanthropist . . . and that we will use all honorable efforts to secure his re-election to that office.” Determined to have a candidate selected before the convention met in June, Republican officials in Springfield settled on Lincoln as the party’s best choice to win in November, deeming “his re-election to be demanded by the best interest of the country.”³⁸

³⁶ Richard Yates to General Fuller, April 14, 1864, Yates Collection, ALPLM; Thomas J. More to Benjamin Franklin Butler, April 11, 1864, in *Private and Official Correspondence of Gen. Benjamin F. Butler, During the Period of the Civil War*, vol. 4 (Norwood, MA: Plimpton Press, 1917), 628; Erastus Wright to Benjamin Franklin Butler, September 4, 1864, in *ibid.*, vol. 5, 748; Cole, “President Lincoln and the Illinois Radical Republicans,” 431; Angle, “*Here I Have Lived*”, 285.

³⁷ Edward L. Baker to Abraham Lincoln, March 7, 1864, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

³⁸ Hubbard, “The Lincoln-McClellan Presidential Election in Illinois,” 16-18, 30-31.

When Lincoln officially received the nomination at the Republican National Convention in Baltimore, it was hard to tell his candidacy was ever in doubt. Over at Camp Butler, Sarah Gregg, the hospital charge, described in her journal the camp's excitement "on hearing that Mr. Lincoln had received the nomination for the presidency and Andy Johnson for vice president." The next night, she continued, "The Springfield folks had a great time this evening over the nomination of Mr. Lincoln – bon fires and etc."³⁹ From his perspective, James C. Conkling judged that "our Union party" – again, not Republican – "are 'waiting and watching' in a solid body and will be ready to act vigorously whenever the campaign opens and an opposition ticket shall be presented [.]" With the Democratic National Convention still more than two months off, Republicans in Springfield and across the North believed momentum was on their side.⁴⁰

Unfortunately for them, bad news from every battlefield was the only thing standing in their way. Reports of military setbacks persisted into the summer, and hope deteriorated with each stumble from Union armies. Sarah Gregg was disheartened after a report in June "that Sherman was repulsed in Georgia." "Oh dear, how long will this war last." General Ulysses S. Grant, who earlier that spring moved East to take command of all Union troops, made news with his offensives against Southern armies and the significant loss of Union life as a result of his aggressive approach. Springfield was experiencing war weariness. Union armies appeared stalled on all fronts that summer, providing critics of the administration proof that the current leadership had failed to deliver on its promises. Even Lincoln worried over his chances that fall unless current conditions reversed. On August 23, 1864, he wrote a memorandum, "it seems exceedingly probable that this administration will not be re-elected," endorsed it, and forced his

³⁹ *The Wartime Diary of Mrs. Sarah Gregg*, June 8, 9, 1864, Sarah Gregg Collection, ALPLM.

⁴⁰ Quinn, "Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War," 70; Hubbard, "The Lincoln-McClellan Presidential Election in Illinois," 48-49.

cabinet to sign it without them asking about its contents. Others in Springfield shared Lincoln's pessimism, bracing for the worst on the eve of their rival's national convention.⁴¹

The Democratic Response

Democrats began their preparations for the presidential election shortly after the November 1863 contests. Party leaders recognized the need to make substantial adjustments if they hoped to retake the White House. Thinking broadly, leading Democrats agreed on a state-based approach in order to rally support, a tactic their rivals also incorporated. As a result, in the weeks after the 1863 election, longtime Democratic editor Charles Lanphier sold his *Illinois State Daily Register* to a stock company whose sole task was getting Democrats elected in 1864. One week before leaving, however, Lanphier urged his readers to begin preparations for a strong Democratic push heading into the new year. "Let the Democratic party buckle on their armor and prepare for the campaign of 1864," the paper wrote on November 18, 1863. Despite the party's disarray following Union military victories in the 1863 summer and setbacks in that year's municipal election, the party was encouraged heading into the 1864 spring after Northern armies failed to capitalize on their prior success. Prospects for ending the war looked no better now than at any other point the previous three years, Democrats exclaimed, and this became the party's most effective attack throughout the campaign.⁴²

Springfield Democrats had good reason to be optimistic. They were encouraged by their rivals' split over Lincoln, pushing the argument that the president "was used up as a popular

⁴¹ *The Wartime Diary of Mrs. Sarah Gregg*, June 28, 1864, Sarah Gregg Collection, ALPLM; Quinn, "Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War," 67-68; Cole, "President Lincoln and the Illinois Radical Republicans," 433; Donald, *Lincoln*, 529; Hubbard, "The Lincoln-McClellan Presidential Election in Illinois," 155.

⁴² J. C. Power, *History of Springfield, Illinois; Its Attractions as a Home and Advantages for Business, Manufacturing, Etc.* (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Journal Print, 1871), 85; Patton, *Glory to God and the Sucker Democracy*, 135; Hubbard, "The Lincoln-McClellan Presidential Election in Illinois," 70.

man.” Furthermore, the Democratic candidate for mayor won the 1864 springtime election with a twelve-vote majority over the self-identified Union candidate; a minor victory to be sure, but under this deeply partisan atmosphere, each party viewed any political victory, small as it might seem, as the ultimate rebuke to their opponents’ political philosophy, whether war related or not. Democrats also fell back on their reliable method of stirring racial animosity. They scared voters of the looming black migration and “Negro equality” that inevitably followed further Republican victories. “It is a plain fact, palpable to the eye of every man who walks the streets of Springfield, that the negro immigration to this city is every day on the increase,” the *Register* wrote despondently in 1864.⁴³

But this last tactic no longer possessed the same potency in 1864 as it did even one year earlier. Democrats that year seized on the Republican war’s mishandling. In June, reports reached Springfield that the soldiers of the 114th Illinois Infantry, known locally as the “Sangamon Regiment,” had been “almost annihilated” in a fight against Confederate troops in Guntown, Mississippi. More than 200 men, over half the regiment, had been killed, wounded, or captured in the battle. One month later the same regiment endured another devastating setback in the Battle at Tupelo, Mississippi. One soldier painfully admitted, “Our regiment has got to be a fraction. This will leave us with but a handful and many of them sick.” Between the two battles, the combined number of Springfield casualties included four killed, 16 wounded, and at least twenty captured. Six of those wounded later died from their wounds.⁴⁴ The community had a difficult time accepting this news, supporters and detractors of the war alike.

⁴³ *Daily Illinois State Register*, April 13, August 21, 1864; *Daily Illinois State Journal*, April 13, 1864; Hubbard, “The Lincoln-McClellan Presidential Election in Illinois,” 33, 83; Quinn, “Lincoln’s Springfield in the Civil War,” 126.

⁴⁴ Quinn, “Lincoln’s Springfield in the Civil War,” 68-69.

War critics did not gloat over these defeats; death affected the entire community. Rather, recurring Northern military defeats only vindicated the Democracy's argument that Republicans were unfit to lead. Democrats claimed their party had run the government efficiently before, they claimed, and only by electing them back to office could the current crisis be resolved. That was the assessment from the young Springfield Democratic sympathizer Anna Ridgely in July:

Our armies have again been defeated. Thousands and thousands of lives have been sacrificed yet nothing accomplished. The south is still unsubdued. What shall we do? Can he ask more men to lay down their lives for nothing? Our only hope is in a Democratic President, or an uprising of the people to demand their rights as free men....⁴⁵

Ridgely's comments were tame compared with some of the other attacks coming out of Lincoln's hometown. Some statements turned personal, devolving into anti-Lincoln harrangues. Foremost in this charge was the *State Register*, barraging the President almost daily with charges ridiculing his character during the campaign, especially after Charles Lanphier sold the paper. The paper mocked his physical features and routinely derided him as a buffoon. The organ described Lincoln as the "man of drafts" and a "widow maker," comparing Lincoln to Nero fiddling while Rome burned. Instead of fiddling, however, the president "amuses himself with retailing stale jokes, and chuckling over his ill-gotten gains while he drives the knife into the heart of civil and religious liberty on the American continent." Republishing an excerpt from a Wisconsin Democratic newspaper, the *Register* hoped: "[M]ay Almighty God forbid that we are to have two terms of the rottenest, most stinking, ruin-working small pox ever conceived by fiends or mortals, in the shape of two terms of Abe Lincoln's administration."⁴⁶ With Northern

⁴⁵ Corneau, "A Girl in the Sixties," 437-438.

⁴⁶ *Daily Illinois State Register*, June 2, July 14, 1864; Hubbard, "The Lincoln-McClellan Presidential Election in Illinois," 109-110, 112. The *Register* did not limit its criticisms to Lincoln, though he endured most of them. After Richard J. Oglesby won the Republican nomination for the state governorship, the Democratic organ described the wounded Union commander as "a 'short-boy,' a 'plug-ugly,' a harlot's 'fancy-man,' or any other synonym of all

armies stalled on Southern frontlines, Democrats and their supporters were optimistic about their chances heading into the fall elections.

But not all was right with the party. For one thing, Democrats had become so associated with treason, fairly or not, that a large percentage of soldiers found their politics unconscionable. No doubt this contributed to the strained atmosphere when furloughed three-year veterans returned home in 1864 after fulfilling their original enlistments. But unlike the randomized destruction the city endured in 1861 with troops stationed downtown at Camp Yates, a lot of the havoc wreaked by these returning veterans was politically motivated. One year earlier, Illinois soldiers read with disgust Democratic legislative attempts to pull the state out of the war, prompting threats from men and entire regiments to turn around, march home and put down the “fire in the rear” before resuming their mission against the Southern foe. These men now had an opportunity to follow through with those threats when they returned home in 1864. Arguably the worst incident occurred after a group of soldiers vandalized the *Register* office that summer, temporarily forcing the press to move its operations elsewhere.⁴⁷ With that year’s presidential campaign underway, various Democratic functions became added prime targets for soldier disruption. This put Democrats in an awkward position trying to persuade soldiers that their party was better suited going forward while simultaneously condemning the current administration in charge of war operations and the Emancipation Proclamation that a majority of the army appreciated as a necessity to ending the conflict in a speedy manner.

Comparatively, Springfield was fortunate to avoid the violent soldier-civilian confrontations that erupted elsewhere. The New York City Draft Riots in 1863 stand out as the

that is utterly abandoned or despicable, but for decency’s sake, never mention Oglesby in connection with the chief-magistracy of Illinois.” See, Angle, *“Here I Have Lived”*, 286.

⁴⁷ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, June 9, 13, 1864; *Daily Illinois State Register*, June 10, 1864; Hubbard, “The Lincoln-McClellan Presidential Election in Illinois,” 102-103.

most cited example of Northern home front dissension between residents and the military, but arguably the second-largest riot during the war occurred less than one hundred miles away from the Illinois capital. This episode, known as the Charleston Riot, occurred on March 28, 1864, and it also involved the return of three-year soldiers. Located southeast of Springfield, the Charleston Riot was the product of growing unease between antiwar locals and furloughed veterans eager to confront them. Charleston and Springfield shared many similarities. Kentucky migrants with Southern sympathies initially settled both areas, but by the 1850s they each began attracting immigrants with Northern ties. Each city was the seat of its respective county; the only difference was that Coles County, which contained Charleston, actually gave Lincoln more votes in 1860 and 1864 than Sangamon County.⁴⁸

Because of the relatively even mix of Republicans and Democrats, central Illinois communities were prone to various forms of riots. An anti-black riot broke out in Peoria and there were at least two instances of citizens attacking draft officers in the region. Brigadier General Jacob Ammen, Illinois's Provost Marshal, urged Governor Richard Yates to provide protection for officers tasked with enforcing the draft in various central Illinois communities or risk further breakouts on a large scale. "In many counties there are organizations and drills, for self protection as is asserted in most cases, but probably to resist the draft."⁴⁹ Despite an adequate Republican presence in Charleston, hostility toward the war increased as the conflict stretched into the third and fourth years. An unrestrained antiwar rhetoric spread owing to many of the town's soldiers away at war and no longer able to challenge this attitude.⁵⁰ The stirrings of

⁴⁸ Charles H. Coleman and Paul H. Spence, "The Charleston Riot, March 28, 1864," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (1908-1984)* 33, no. 1 (1940): 8-9.

⁴⁹ Jacob Ammen to Richard Yates, August 12, 1863, Yates Collection, ALPLM.

⁵⁰ Aside from their disruptive presence in town, the soldier presence at nearby Camp Butler essentially precluded antiwar riots from taking place in Springfield.

a confrontation were therefore set when the three-year veterans on furlough returned home eager to purge any disloyal sympathies.

On the eve of the Charleston Riot, men in uniform walked around town forcing many residents – including known opponents of the war – to swear an oath of allegiance to the Union and President Abraham Lincoln. These actions, including accounts of confrontations between soldiers and Peace Democrats in surrounding communities, only heightened the tension in town. Rumors spread of Copperheads collecting arms and drilling in preparation for an encounter with outspoken furloughed soldiers. In the words of two experts on the subject: “It is no wonder that a riot broke out. It would have been a greater wonder if the day had passed peacefully.”⁵¹ Details of the riot, including which individual fired the first shot, remain unknown. But when the ordeal had finished, nine men laid dead and another twelve received wounds. Six of the killed and four of the wounded were soldiers, meaning that Copperheads – who had outnumbered troops on the scene – received most of the blame for instigating the confrontation.⁵²

Antiwar sentiment was often undistinguishable from animosity against soldiers, at least from the Republican perspective, and the Charleston Riot served as a backdrop to the heated political debates of the 1864 campaign. Not surprisingly, Springfield’s rival presses accused the other side of prompting the conflict. After the riot, the *Register* claimed, “No honest and intelligent man, who knows anything about the conduct of soldiers toward citizens when they take it into their heads to get on the rampage, can doubt that this disturbance was brought on by the insolent and insufferable conduct of the soldiers themselves.” The editor also offered this advice: “Hereafter, when democrats are assaulted by soldiers, our advice is that after disposing of their assailants, they ascertain, if possible, who it was that incited the attack, and retaliate upon

⁵¹ Coleman and Spence, "The Charleston Riot, March 28, 1864," 15-19.

⁵² *Ibid*, 19-20, 27-29. For a detailed analysis, see Coleman and Spence, “The Charleston Riot, March 28, 1864.”

that man sharply, in kind.” The *Journal* was quick to rebut these charges. After documenting multiple instances of violence directed toward veterans throughout the state in early 1864, the Republican organ accused Democratic presses of inciting these attacks and afterward pinning the blame on the troops. “These acts of outrage have invariably been committed by Copperheads whose malignity towards the soldiers in these instances seem as bitter as that manifested by the rebels themselves.” Justifying revenge against this type of behavior as their opponents had done, the *Journal* urged furloughed men “to be law-abiding at home as they are brave and patriotic in the field,” but added, “it is the right and duty of every man to protect himself to the last extremity, when unjustly assailed.” The two editors, going back and forth, spent the following days providing their respective readership with the correct details of the incident while their rival spewed myths and lies.⁵³

Aside from their precarious relationship with Illinois’s soldiery, Springfield Democrats were also beset by internal divisions, arguably worse than those affecting their opponents. Whereas Republicans differed over Lincoln’s handling of the war, Democrats divided over whether to keep fighting at all. Most in town, still beholden to Stephen A. Douglas three years after his death, remained faithful to the “Little Giant’s” last words pleading for the suspension of partisan politics with the fate of the nation at risk. They continued to support the war, only objecting to what they perceived as a growing Republican overreach of power, best exemplified in the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation. Others condemned the war entirely and argued that an immediate peace would prompt the seceded states to rejoin the Union – with slavery still intact – though they provided little evidence that any Confederate state wanted to return. There were also those who had no problems with states leaving the country whenever they pleased.

⁵³ *Daily Illinois State Register*, April 2, 1864; *Daily Illinois State Journal*, March 7, April 4, 1864; Hubbard, “The Lincoln-McClellan Presidential Election in Illinois,” 169.

Some Springfield Democrats held this antiwar view, but publicly it was the minority position of the two strands of thought. This division plagued Democrats throughout the North, forcing the party to push back its national convention by eight weeks, from July 4 to August 29. Not only would this delay the party's official nominee for president, but it also postponed the selection of national and state candidates as a result. Local Republicans, not surprisingly, interpreted this delay positively. From Springfield, James C. Conkling expressed to Lyman Trumbull:

The postponement of the Chicago convention we regard as an indication that the elements of the Democratic party are too hostile at present, to enable them to work harmoniously and it is very doubtful whether any thing can possibly occur within two months which can reconcile their discordant views.⁵⁴

Conkling was on to something. The Illinois capital was not immune from the violent outbreaks that erupted on the Northern homefront during the Civil War, but one of the more noteworthy instances occurred *within* the Democratic ranks in the summer of 1864, when the party's split over the war came to a head in Lincoln's hometown. Less than one month before the party's convention in Chicago, leading Illinois Democrats scheduled two rallies, one in Peoria and the other in Springfield, in order to drum up support for the faithful. The August 3 rally in Peoria passed without any hitches. The like-minded crowd expressed support for peace candidates running for political office. The officers presented a peace platform, but they delayed voting on it until the meeting in Springfield fifteen days later. Democrats in Peoria that day left confident of their party's momentum and growing unity.⁵⁵

But Springfield was not Peoria. The meeting in Springfield highlighted the Democrats' dilemma going into the presidential campaign. Located seventy miles south of Peoria, the Springfield gathering drew a more diverse following, attracting many who read with disgust of

⁵⁴ James C. Conkling to Lyman Trumbull, June 29, 1864, Trumbull Collection, ALPLM; *ibid*, 51-52.

⁵⁵ Information on this event in the following paragraphs can be found in the August 19, 1864 issues of the *Daily Illinois State Register* and the *Daily Illinois State Journal* as well as Hubbard, 91-94, and Quinn, 71-72.

the overwhelming peace presence at the Peoria rally. This set up a potentially testy confrontation. Leading off was James W. Singleton who first grabbed the podium on the main stage. The individual from Quincy, Illinois was one of the officers at the Peoria rally and one of the state's leading Peace Democrats. He declared himself chairman of the Springfield gathering upon reaching the podium, determined to pick up where the Peoria meeting left off. From stage one Singleton delivered a "speech of the strong peace stripe," according to one Republican observer. Henry Clay Dean of Iowa followed with a lecture detailing the war's many failures. Afterward, Singleton returned to the podium preparing to finalize the party's platform and pass the resolutions proposed two weeks earlier in Peoria. Up to that point, the event had so far gone smoothly.

But when Singleton got back on stage, everything broke down. The crowd, most of whom had not attended the Peoria meeting, refused to accept the resolutions demanding an immediate peace. The sticking point was whether Illinois Democrats should support the national party's choice for a president. As a representative of the peace movement, Singleton demanded that the audience only approve a peace candidate as the party's standard-bearer, but received backlash for this statement. He was booed off stage after objecting to a counter-resolution offered by Springfield's William Springer that declared the party support whomever its leaders settled on. But Singleton and his adherents refused to drop the issue. They made their way to another stand whereupon Singleton took the podium and exclaimed Democrats could not trust the Chicago convention to nominate the best candidate. The restless crowd accused Singleton of trying to disrupt the meeting, charging him with working alongside Governor Yates to further divide the party. This accusation gained strength and spread throughout the fairgrounds,

escalating to a point that men and women on benches stood up and began shouting at each other, causing one of the stages to collapse.

Just before its collapse, the crowd that had gathered at the second stage adopted Springer's resolution. Afterward a group rushed over to the main stage in order to pass Springer's resolution there, too. But Singleton and his allies got to the podium first and continued to press their case, with one imploring that Jefferson Davis should "take his section and go off in peace." When Springer's adherents reached the stage and grabbed hold of the podium, the crowd chanted for Springer to address them, who did so again with his resolution. The crowd handily drowned out Singleton's men "with a whirlwind of applause." Singleton left the stand dejected and no longer willing to take part in the meeting. But his supporters stuck around and a fight ensued between them and Springer's backers near the main stage. The fight eventually died down, but by that point the meeting had ended. Instead of constructing unity, which was the sole objective of the rally, the Democrats who gathered that day in Springfield left with bigger concerns. And while Republicans had their own internal issues, they at least had a nominee in place and had not experienced the type of violence that transpired that day in Springfield. It was a challenging period for Illinois Democrats who had little idea how events would play out eleven days before the Chicago convention.

Ambivalence remained, even after the party nominated George B. McClellan, former commander of the Army of the Potomac and a man whose military decision-making and hesitancy on the battlefield gave Lincoln plenty of consternation earlier in the war. McClellan's choice as the Democratic candidate for president was surprising, particularly since no one knew what platform he would run on. Would he continue to pursue the war, considering he was a former army general? Would he seek an immediate end to it through peace? The party's

selection of George H. Pendleton, a vocal critic of the war, hardly cleared things up. But with the top of the ticket finally revealed the party now needed to set aside any internal differences, even those perhaps still lingering from the Democratic rally in Springfield just two weeks earlier. “NOW IS THE TEST,” the *Register* published after the convention wrapped up. “We shall now see who are true democrats, and who are simply playing into the hands of the abolitionists by endeavoring to excite dissensions and discontent among the people.”⁵⁶ Historian Jennifer Weber described the atmosphere coming out of the Chicago convention as the “high-water mark for the Copperheads,” but two hundred miles to the Windy City’s south Democrats were no more certain of their fate than their Republican rivals. The *Register* remained resolute, however, convinced on September 1 that “The ticket is sure to win.”⁵⁷

The Campaign

The next day, reports from the Southern frontlines eliminated whatever momentum the Democrats gained from the Chicago convention. “The news came here that Sherman has taken Atlanta,” Sarah Gregg penned on September 2, “Whoorah for Sherman and his boys.” “Atlanta answers to Chicago” led the September 5 edition of the *Journal*. “The Copperheads are covered with confusion and dismay of the unexpected result.” For Republicans worried about the party’s uncertain prospects heading into the campaign’s final two months, the news from Atlanta was a shot of adrenaline. Administration allies in Springfield organized a rally at the State House for September 7 to rejoice “over the glorious successes of the Union arms.” It would be the ultimate “way to demonstrate true loyalty” to the men fighting on their behalf. Perhaps more importantly,

⁵⁶ *Daily Illinois State Register*, September 1, 1864; Hubbard, “The Lincoln-McClellan Presidential Election in Illinois,” 92.

⁵⁷ *Daily Illinois State Register*, September 1, 1864; Weber, *Copperheads*, 171.

it was a way to prove “that no cowardly fire in the rear shall prevent [the troops] from compelling traitors to submit to the just and constitutional authority of the Government.”⁵⁸

Anyone interested in celebrating the recent military victories was welcome to the September 7 rally, but few observers – then and now – could fail to see the demonstration’s Republican slant.

Aside from the newspaper, the most overt method of reaching nineteenth-century voters was the mass meeting. Mass meetings were least effective influencing noncommittal voters in the closing months of an election, but they had been a mainstay of the nation’s political past. These meetings provided opportunities for devoted members to reconnect with old friends and listen to party gospel. The state capital was host to a large share of Illinois’s mass gatherings, especially in this campaign’s final two months. In an effort to recreate the enthusiasm of 1860, Republicans built a Wigwam similar to the one in town four years ago.⁵⁹ At its dedication, William Herndon lectured on slavery’s role in bringing war upon the nation, and only with the institution’s extinction would the fighting end. Lincoln’s actions to free the slaves were “humane, just, and wise,” he told his standing-room only audience.⁶⁰

Mass meetings in Springfield held a special significance for Republican supporters. After four years of national scrutiny, Lincoln’s reputation had taken a beating in his hometown. At a Democratic Mass Meeting held in town earlier that year, one attendee carried a sign that read,

⁵⁸ *The Wartime Diary of Mrs. Sarah Gregg*, September 2, 1864, Sarah Gregg Collection, ALPLM; *Daily Illinois State Journal*, September 2, 5, 7, 1864.

⁵⁹ Hubbard, "The Lincoln-McClellan Presidential Election in Illinois," 128.

⁶⁰ Herndon expressed similar sentiments in a letter to a pro-Republican group in the Athens Township near Springfield that fall. He was scheduled to address the crowd, but an ongoing bout with bronchitis forced him to bow out. In his letter he expanded on the inability of slavery coexisting alongside a free society. “Slavery and freedom are deadly enemies – are absolute antagonists – sworn and bitter foes. They cannot live peaceably or otherwise at all together. You may try to reconcile them, but you might just as well ask good powder and live hickory coals, placed in the same keg together, to be calm, cool, and unexplosive.” “W. H. Herndon on The Democratic Platform,” 1864, Lincoln Collection, ALPLM; Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon*, 162-163. Some presumed Herndon’s campaign silence demonstrated a lack of loyalty to Lincoln, asserting that the former law partner was “cold towards him.” Herndon explained his actions to Lincoln’s secretaries, reaffirming his commitment to the president. See William H. Herndon to John G. Nicolay and John Hay, September 25, 1864, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

“We want a man for President, and not a clown who now presides in Washington.”⁶¹

Springfield’s Republicans therefore used mass meetings to rehabilitate Abraham Lincoln’s character amongst his former neighbors.

One effort was to encourage Lincoln to return to his old home. Would his reputation not improve with a trip back to Illinois? For an upcoming rally put on by the Springfield Union League, Chicago’s James P. Root wrote to Lincoln, “We would not object to your... visit[ing] us on the 5th of October at your old house, when the loyal masses of Illinois will assemble to testify their devotion to the Union and the administration.” Lincoln graciously declined the offer, as he had done the year before, so it fell to others to reflect on the President’s positive qualities.⁶² Interestingly enough, no one did that better than Wisconsin Republican Senator James R. Doolittle. Speaking at the Wigwam on October 5, Doolittle reminded his Springfield audience of the national apprehension on the eve of Lincoln’s inauguration. Doolittle reminisced on that scene in town on the morning of February 11, 1861, Lincoln’s last moments in Springfield. “In the whole history of the world there is nothing more simple, more touching, or more sublime than the scene of his departure.” Doolittle reflected on the sadness of the president-elect’s parting:

“Citizens of Springfield, what a scene was here presented on that memorable eleventh of February! It still lives in your memories. The words he uttered at parting with you, as you stood around him uncovered and in tears, are known the world over; they are classic alike in their simplicity, touching pathos, and depth of meaning.”

⁶¹ Quinn, "Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War," 71-72.

⁶² Office of the Secretary of the Illinois Grand Council, U. L. A., Springfield, Sept. 22, 1864, Lincoln Collection, ALPLM; James P. Root to Abraham Lincoln, Thursday, September 22, 1864, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

Doolittle then read Lincoln's farewell, emphasizing the overwhelming "duty [that] devolves upon me" as well as Lincoln's hope that "you, my friends, will all pray that I may receive that Divine assistance, without which I can not succeed, but with which success is certain."⁶³

Lincoln had become distant and removed from his hometown since his departure. Even though Lincoln left Springfield for the White House, Doolittle wanted the crowd to understand that Springfield had never left him. "I know, from personal knowledge, that the sense of that great duty which he felt and expressed at his departure from this place in February, 1861, has been ever present with him—has never forsaken him. It has become, and is, the absorbing idea of his soul." The president's opponents failed to appreciate the challenges before him and why he had taken certain actions. "Could those who denounce Mr. Lincoln as a tyrant and usurper know him as you have known him for a quarter of a century, or as I have seen him and come to know him at Washington, during these last four years of trial, their tongues would cleave to the roof of their mouths." No part of the country understood Lincoln better than his longtime Springfield friends and neighbors, Doolittle exclaimed, and the president needed their help one last time. With Union armies again making headway, Doolittle requested that the voters of Springfield give their longtime neighbor another four years in office:

"The people of Illinois in vast multitudes are now gathering at Springfield—the home of Abraham Lincoln. And for what? To send him words of encouragement and good cheer; to declare that he must and shall be reelected President of the United States, in order that he may finish the great work assigned him; to ask God's blessing to sustain and strengthen him; and to pledge themselves to stand by him in this great struggle to the end, and until Abraham Lincoln is not only President-elect of the United States, but acknowledged and respected as the President of all the states, united and free."⁶⁴

⁶³ Duane Mowry, "Speech Delivered by Senator James R. Doolittle, Springfield, Illinois, October 4, 1864," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 2, no. 3 (October 1909): 30-32.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 33, 37.

Mass meetings were still integral to Springfield's Democrats, but the capture of Atlanta invalidated the party's platform of discrediting its opponents' handling of the war. Members therefore reverted to emphasizing Republican overreach at the expense of whites. At a "monster rally" at the Courthouse, Congressman John T. Stuart's "calm, temperate, and convincing" lecture on the passage of emancipation as a supposedly war-related measure illustrated Republicans' preference for abolition over the welfare of the Union.⁶⁵ The party's biggest liability, however, was its inability to disassociate members from traitors actually complicit in the nation's demise. Democratic rallies best exemplified this divide, especially with Illinois soldiers hanging around the area. Four days after news of Atlanta's capture reached Springfield, between fifty and one hundred veterans raided a Democratic meeting at the State House. The *Register* reported these men had consumed too much alcohol then began running around the entire building "yelling like fiends." The *Journal* defended the soldiers' actions, however, claiming that they were tired of hearing disparaging remarks about their service.⁶⁶

The rival presses quarreled over a controversial outbreak at another Democratic function on October 10, making it nearly impossible to know what actually transpired. Chris Kribben, a Democratic speaker, was addressing a crowd of Germans in their native tongue when a group of 200 to 300 soldiers interrupted the affair. According to the *Register*, Kribben tried to talk over the ruckus but could not compete with the men in uniform. Kribben and his supporters left, at which point a "Union soldier Munford" took the stage and proceeded to give a pro-Lincoln speech.⁶⁷ Compare that assessment with the one offered by Republicans. The *Journal* claimed

⁶⁵ Hubbard, "The Lincoln-McClellan Presidential Election in Illinois," 116, 119, 165.

⁶⁶ Quinn, "Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War," 129.

⁶⁷ *Daily Illinois State Register*, October 11, 1864; Hubbard, "The Lincoln-McClellan Presidential Election in Illinois," 122-123.

Kribben, who was scheduled to speak in an upstairs courtroom, moved the lecture to the steps of the courthouse due to meager attendance. Soldiers in the area, unaware of the event, walked by and decided to listen, the *Journal* reported. Kribben aroused the troops when he began insulting “Old Abe,” at which point they collectively shouted down Kribben and his audience, prompting them to leave the building.⁶⁸ This tactic became a fixture at rallies during the campaign: one side accused the other of trespassing and causing a disturbance, while the other decried its innocence and redirected the majority of the blame on the opposition. No one was ever at fault, making life difficult for the historian attempting to discern fact from fiction.

Try as they might, Springfield’s Democrats – still publicly in favor of war against the rebellion – could not shake loose its ties to treasonous associations in the campaign’s final two months, which picked up with intensity in the aftermath of the Democratic National Convention. Peace men dominated the gathering in Chicago, the *Journal* stated, and the platform reflected their sympathies. “Lincoln wants to sustain the Government,” Herndon at one point asserted, “McClellan wants (if he stands on the Chicago Platform) to overthrow the Government.” Anyone advocating for the overthrow of the U.S. Constitution, he exclaimed, was “a traitor, more or less, open and avowed.”⁶⁹ Republicans recognized that these attacks resonated with individuals, and they escalated charges of rumored plots and conspiracies from Copperhead factions. For instance, Governor Yates received a letter from an Indiana man who warned of a plot to raid the state arsenal in Springfield just ahead of the election. The group involved was affiliated with the antiwar Sons of Liberty, he advised the governor, and they planned to distribute arms stolen from the arsenal to Democrats throughout the state if the results proved unfavorable.⁷⁰ Other attacks

⁶⁸ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, October 11, 12, 1864; *ibid*, 123-124.

⁶⁹ “W. H. Herndon on The Democratic Platform,” 1864, Lincoln Collection, ALPLM; *ibid*, 58.

⁷⁰ A. H. Lackey to Richard Yates, August 6, 1864, Yates Collection, ALPLM.

were equally dubious, including the *Journal's* listing of print materials left behind following a Democratic rally at the State House:

VALUABLE PUBLICATIONS	
First Year of the War by Pollard, of Richmond.....	\$2 50
Confederate Official Reports.....	3 00
Life of Stonewall Jackson.....	1 50
Life of Stephen A. Douglas.....	1 75
Raids and Romance of Morgan and his Men.....	1 75
<u>Fine Steel Portrait of Gen. Geo. B. McClellan.....</u>	<u>2 00</u> ⁷¹

As these and other examples make clear, the slightest critique of the war was often akin to sympathy with the Confederacy. For Democrats who raised concerns or questioned the direction of the war, they fell victim to charges of “Copperheadism.” The *Register* was fully aware that this was their opponents’ strategy. “Our enemies seem to rely more than anything else upon this insane cry — this bedlamite shout of ‘copperhead.’” For instance:

When you oppose to the old toryism of the black republican party, the great fundamental principles of the Declaration of Independence, you get as a response, ‘Oh, that is copperheadism!’ When you point out to these people the limitations placed by the constitution upon the exercise of power by the president, they hiss at you, ‘you are a copperhead!’ When you present the dark array of damning proofs which show that the true meaning and real intention of the black republicans in all they say and do is to overthrow the very foundations upon which the Union was built by the wise men and patriots of ‘76 — the freedom and independence of the states, and the liberty of the people, you are answered by the shriek of ‘copperhead!’⁷²

The editor was on to something. Springfield Democrats hardly acted or thought alike, but their opponents criticized them as if they did. Some may have sympathized with the peace wing of the party, but they were less vocal about it. Others, such as young Anna Ridgely, supported the cause, but often wondered if the devastation was worth it. She hailed from a Democratic household but volunteered her time at the Soldier’s Aid Society. John T. Stuart ran for Congress in 1862 as a pro-war Democrat, yet he condemned emancipation. Others fought in the war,

⁷¹ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, September 9, 1864.

⁷² *Daily Illinois State Register*, September 1, October 19, 1864.

including Tom Vredenburg, the son of Mayor John S. Vredenburg. One visitor “heard” that the father, John, had ties to the Knights of the Golden Circle, after Tom enlisted as a private in the 10th Illinois Calvary. In June 1863, reports reached town that his regiment was engaged in a hard-fought battle at Milliken’s Bend, and that Tom had not survived the encounter. News that the mayor’s son had been killed shook the community. Lincoln family friend Mercy Conkling described the young Vredenburg as “a fine young man,” and was still holding out “hope he will be found a prisoner and not killed.” Without hesitation, however, in the very next sentence she wrote, “His family are strong secessionists,” without offering any explanation. Young Tom Vredenburg survived the skirmish, and served until his enlistment ended in October 1865, departing the military as a lieutenant colonel. However, despite serving in an army to crush the rebellion, his family’s Democratic affiliation was reason enough for Conkling to label them secessionists. In the background of a fiery presidential campaign, the line between Democrats and traitors was never thinner than it was during this election; according to Springfield Republicans, identification with one faction instinctively meant association with the other.⁷³

This peculiarity is harder to explain when examining the wartime experiences of one of Springfield’s most recognized Democrats, John A. McClernand. In 1860, McClernand worked tirelessly to get his mentor Stephen A. Douglas elected president. In defeat, McClernand, like his mentor Douglas, laid most of the blame for the outcome on the Southern wing of the Democratic Party. During the secession crisis, McClernand endeared himself to Republicans by demanding the Union’s preservation and publicly scorning anyone who suggested Illinois follow suit. He angered many in his own party when he rejected attempts to compromise with the seceded states.

⁷³ For speculation on John Vredenburg's connection to secret organizations, see Klement, "Copperhead Secret Societies," 170; .Mercy Levering Conkling to Clinton Conkling, June 22, 1863, Conkling Family Collection, ALPLM.

He was a featured speaker at the large gathering in the State House after the fall of Fort Sumter, declaring that “this was no time for partisanship – all men must stand by the government and their flag.” Still no fan of Lincoln or Republicans, even though he considered himself a friend of the president, McClelland affirmed he “would sacrifice party on the altar of the country.” Douglas echoed this exact sentiment in the same spot nearly one month later just before his death. McClelland put Douglas’s words into action, receiving an officer’s commission from Lincoln later that summer.⁷⁴

But McClelland’s military career was brief and lackluster, and he found himself constantly embroiled in controversy while serving alongside Generals Ulysses S. Grant and William T. Sherman. This led to his dismissal in the summer of 1863, and he spent the rest of the war trying to clear his name. Those back in Springfield, however, gave McClelland a hero’s welcome home. Citizens of all political stripes in Illinois’ capital city appreciated McClelland’s contributions. Local Republicans honored him with a reception and listened attentively to the general’s war stories. The *Republican Journal* wrote that McClelland had the “undiminished ... confidence of the people.” Governor Yates wrote the general in 1862, “the masses of the democratic party and all the republicans rank & file have the warmest feelings for you.”⁷⁵ After his military departure, McClelland traveled throughout the North delivering speeches to pro-Union crowds, no longer a member of Congress having resigned his seat upon enlistment in the Army. He even spoke at Springfield’s 1863 Republican Mass Meeting despite his continued identification with the Democratic Party.⁷⁶ “Strike for the Union and strike against its Enemies,” he extolled in a letter to an acquaintance in Galesburg one week after the rally. “A great mission

⁷⁴ Kiper, *Major General John Alexander McClelland*, 17-20, 24-25.

⁷⁵ Richard Yates to John A. McClelland, March 26, 1862, Yates Collection, ALPLM.

⁷⁶ Kiper, *Major General John Alexander McClelland*, 273-274.

is confided to us: to keep alive the fires upon the alter of liberty. At whatever personal cost, this must be done.”⁷⁷

Yet no amount of coaxing induced McClelland to work against the Democracy. He still adhered to the party of Stephen A. Douglas, doing all he could to prevent its demise. He maintained regular contact with Charles Lanphier, the Democratic editor of the *Register* before he sold it in late-1863, who kept the general apprised of political developments back in Illinois. Leading War Democrats in the state invited McClelland to a mass meeting in October 1863 in Decatur because he avowed “to stand by your government and our gallant soldiers in the field, until the last rebel lays down his arms and submits to the Constitution of our fathers, and the Laws enacted by the people.”⁷⁸ During the 1864 campaign, however, McClelland actively supported McClellan’s presidential candidacy. McClelland dismissed allegations from both parties that McClellan would call for an immediate peace if elected – another example of the complex makeup of the Northern Democratic Party – asserting instead that as general, “Little Mac” believed “in the sovereignty of the people,” that he would prosecute the war more effectively and vigorously than Lincoln, and “would preserve the Union at all hazards.”⁷⁹ After the war, McClelland maintained a presence in national politics as a member of the Democratic Party, working to foil the efforts of the Radical Republicans in the postwar period.

Lastly, Springfield Democrats escaped treasonous charges if they publicly expressed support for the war and the administration. That was the case with longtime lawyer and state official Mason Brayman. Brayman enlisted and was commissioned a major in the 29th Infantry, serving under the command of General John A. McClelland. Brayman also adhered to the ailing

⁷⁷ John A. McClelland to Clark E. Carr, September 9, 1863, McClelland Collection, ALPLM.

⁷⁸ “To the Union War Democracy of Illinois,” 1863, McClelland Collection, ALPLM.

⁷⁹ Kiper, *Major General John Alexander McClelland*, 291.

Stephen A. Douglas's 1861 pleas for suspension of partisanship, yet he continued to identify with the Democratic Party throughout the war. Aside from the issue of emancipation, however, Brayman was a steadfast supporter of Lincoln and was equally determined to see the war to its end. He criticized the nasty political environment back home as a distraction from the fighting – “We want soldiers not candidates” – but continued to follow developments in both the North and the South. In September 1864, Brayman informed his son-in-law and joint owner of the *State Journal*, William H. Bailhache, “The rebels here [in Mississippi] are inquiring daily, their last hope of disunion being apparently dependent upon the success of the Chicago nomination. Could they vote, the Chicago platform would be the beginning of the end, that end a dishonorable peace, and the disgrace of our arms.”⁸⁰ To prevent that from happening, Brayman, who had voted for Douglas in 1860, had now cast his lot with Lincoln, “a man of such exalted patriotism, perverse honesty and unerring good sense.” “I am quite disposed to see this thing out with him,” Brayman admitted early in 1864, “and no other commander-in-chief, shutting my ‘sot’ democratic eyes, holding my fossilized democratic nose a little, clinging to the idea that I am still a Democrat, and musing the delusion that he is as good a leader as any of us deserve.”⁸¹

As these examples demonstrate, historians should proceed with caution before lumping all devotees of a political party into a single line of thinking, even though Republicans did exactly that with their opponents in the 1864 campaign. Republicans accused Democrats of disloyalty and aiding in the Confederacy regardless of the blatant inaccuracies in that logic. Yet this was an effective strategy in the weeks leading up to Election Day.

Illinois Democrats faced another dilemma: what to do about the thousands of Union veterans still in the military eager to participate in the election. On the one hand, the Army had

⁸⁰ Mason Brayman to William Bailhache, September 5, 1864, Bailhache-Brayman Collection, ALPLM.

⁸¹ Mason Brayman to William Bailhache, January 11, 1864, Bailhache-Brayman Collection, ALPLM.

become more Republican over the duration of the war, and Democrats understood that granting soldiers voting rights would only benefit their opponents. On the other hand, if Democrats denied troops in the field an opportunity to vote, they opened themselves up to further charges of disloyalty. This was a no-win situation for the party.

Steadman Hatch wrote to his brother in Springfield, Illinois Secretary of State Ozias, “The Army is nearly unanimous for Lincoln yet I do not suppose that Ill soldiers will be able to exercise the right to suffrage. A burning shame,” he argued, that men willing to risk “their lives in their country’s behalf cannot be allowed a voice in the election of its rulers.” Veteran units over at Camp Butler polled men in their regiments over which candidate they preferred, a practice done in military clusters across the country. In one instance, the men of the 3rd Illinois Cavalry overwhelmingly favored Lincoln’s reelection 322 votes to 15. The veterans of Company E, 23rd Illinois Regiment, stationed at Camp Yates settled on the candidates in this order: Lincoln with 55 votes, McClellan with 7, and Frémont with 5. Another poll taken a few days later of soldiers scattered throughout town found that they unanimously favored Lincoln over McClellan by a vote of 140 to 0. This attitude reached beyond Illinois. Springfield’s Thomas S. Mather, an officer in the Second Illinois Light Infantry stationed in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, wrote to Governor Yates wondering if he and his fellow companions would be able to travel home and vote. Soldiers from other states had been granted furloughs for that very reason, he said, and Mather wanted the same opportunity to make sure the “Copperheads [were] sent to hell.” Joseph R. Cox, a member of the 9th Illinois Infantry stationed just outside Atlanta, had resigned himself to the likelihood he would be unable to get home before the election took place. “The great cry” coming from the ranks was to reelect Lincoln “for the unexpired term of the war, and the soldiers will see that his fighting goes on all right.” “We can only fight,” Cox told his brother back in

Springfield, “you can vote. Give us such men as Lincoln & Johnson, Grant & Sherman.” “Vote right,” he urged his sibling, “and we will do the fighting on the square.”⁸²

Republican officials also pressed this issue, though primarily to neutralize any potential Democratic threat. Aware that soldiers sided with the administration, Republicans in Illinois worried about their prospects of carrying the state without the Army’s vote. A majority of those who eventually enlisted voted for Lincoln in 1860; withholding those ballots this time around might cost them the election. These fears arose that summer just after the Republican National Convention, one of the party’s lowest points of the war. Soldiers and statesmen sent letters to Lincoln and Yates suggesting they use their positions of authority to head off this quandary. Lincoln’s friends in the State House urged the President to implement special furloughs for non-essential soldiers to travel back to the state during the latter part of October. From Illinois, Elihu Washburne wrote Lincoln that there were four thousand Illinois soldiers stationed at Camp Butler who were not registered to vote in that district. Would “not public interest permit instant furlough” for these eligible voters, Washburne asked? “If nothing was done to bring these men home to cast a ballot,” he explained to Lincoln, Republicans could expect to “lose 20,000 votes in our majority of 1860,” leaving the party in a terrible hole.⁸³

Democratic leaders, led by the *Register*, pushed back against the claim that soldiers were nearly unanimous in their support for Lincoln. But “unruly soldiers” home on furlough targeted Democratic functions and meetings, and party leaders ultimately deferred to Illinois law that prohibited anyone outside their polling district on Election Day from voting, including troops fighting outside the state. To ward off any backlash for this position, the *Register* encouraged

⁸² Steadman Hatch to O. M. Hatch, August 16, 1864, O. M. Hatch Collection, ALPLM; Thomas S. Mather to Richard Yates, Nov 3, 1864, Yates Collection, ALPLM; Joseph Cox to Charles Cox, Oct 30, 1864, Joseph R. Cox Collection, ALPLM.

⁸³ Hubbard, "The Lincoln-McClellan Presidential Election in Illinois," 174-178.

soldiers who happened to be at home on Election Day – not those sent back solely to cast a ballot – to vote. They also argued that it was a Republican clause in the state’s constitution preventing usage of absentee ballots; therefore, Democrats were actually on the side of the troops, they claimed. But this was not enough to remove the blemish of treason hurting the party. Soldiers and civilians alike had little trouble differentiating between the party working with soldiers and the one that was not.⁸⁴

As the party in control of federal and state military operations, Republicans granted furloughs, extended the leave for men already on furlough, or reassigned men stationed in the South to a detail back home just in time for the election. The top commander in Illinois, Brigadier General John Cook, received orders from the War Department in late-October that extended the leave for soldiers in that state until November 10 or later, two days after the election. To prevent voting fraud, veteran units and arms were sent to Camp Butler “for guard duty” and to disrupt an alleged scheme by “a large body of men within the District of Illinois, both openly and in disguise, so to organize at the ensuing National Election” and “interfere with the honest expression of the Electors.”⁸⁵

Democrats accused Republicans with influencing the election based on the timing of these actions and claimed supporters of the administration had their own clandestine designs. “Numerous instances of fraud have recently come to light in this state where complete stands of arms have been furnished by the secret abolition societies for the purpose of intimidating democrats and controlling the election,” the *Register* claimed. Additionally, Lincoln and Yates should be scorned and reprimanded for placing politics over the welfare of the country. Their

⁸⁴ *Daily Illinois State Register*, November 10, 1864; *ibid*, 187.

⁸⁵ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, October 24, 1864; James Hefferman to Richard Yates, October 17, 1864, Yates Collection, ALPLM; Circular, Brigadier General John Cook, Headquarters District of Illinois, Springfield, November 3, 1864, in *Daily Illinois State Journal*, November 1864.

involvement in stripping men from the frontlines to cast ballots back home put the North at risk of another Southern invasion. They also based reassignment decisions on political, not military, necessity. Troops who vowed to vote Republican garnered a majority of furloughs, Democrats claimed, while those who favored McClellan remained far away from their local districts. To make its case, the *Register* published a brief report about the men of the 61st Illinois Infantry. They were on their way to Illinois just ahead of the election but redirected back to the frontlines when someone learned that most of the regiment supported Democratic candidates. That would explain, according to Democrats at least, why so many soldiers around Springfield near Election Day backed Lincoln: Democratic troops continued to man the Southern frontlines.⁸⁶

The two parties stepped up attacks on their opponents and efforts to sway voters in the campaign's final weeks. Mass meetings were held almost daily at the Wigwam in the closing days, featuring an appearance by Major General Joseph Hooker who stopped by to address a pro-Union crowd one day. Baptists who supported the Lincoln ticket were invited to attend special prayer services every day beginning in October until Election Day. The less pious, on the other hand, could always scan the columns of the *Journal* for the most recent party updates. There they read of opposition groups planning to stuff ballots for Democrats or reminders of what a McClellan victory would mean. "Remember what the Charleston Mercury says: 'His election upon the Chicago platform must lead to peace and our independence.'" The *Journal* also reminded readers what Stephen A. Douglas, the most popular Democrat in Springfield before his death, said in the early days of war. Back then the most pressing issue facing the country was "a question of Government or no Government; country or no country." Not even four years had

⁸⁶ *Daily Illinois State Register*, November 8, 1864; Hubbard, "The Lincoln-McClellan Presidential Election in Illinois," 172-174, 185-188.

passed, the *Journal* editor claimed, and Democrats had strayed from the flock and forgotten these wise words from Douglas in their support for rebeldom.⁸⁷

Local Democrats countered these attacks – as Republicans likewise did – and raised some of their own. Instead of condemning war, after Atlanta they blamed the lengthy intervals between major Union military victories on Republican mismanagement. Democratic leadership would finally bring the war to an end, McClellan enthusiasts claimed. “The democrats are the last men to depreciate the glory and the value of the splendid victories won” thus far, the *Register* tried to make clear, but “everybody ought to know full well that under the management of anybody but a blind and fantastic abolitionist, or an imbecile bigot, such victories ought to have resulted in some benefit to our cause.” The war itself was not a failure, and the soldiers deserved praise for doing their mission, but “after four years of desperate fighting; after the splendid successes ... we find ourselves no nearer the end for which the nation took up arms than we were at the beginning.” In that same edition, the *Register* published editorials under headlines such as “Why the War Has Failed” and “Why Mr. Lincoln Should Not Re-Elected.” On October 31, the Democratic organ printed an unflattering exposé on Mary Lincoln and her time in the White House. The lengthy section insulted her mental stability, her education, her ambition, her scandalous behavior, and her sense of entitlement, even referring to the death of her son Willie in 1862 as the one event that brought “this vain and foolish woman to her senses.” “We put this flea in the ear of the ladies, to induce them to save the domestic as we are striving to save the emotional credit of the country.” The time to act was now. “Up boys, and at ‘em! And when the

⁸⁷ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, November 7, 1864; *ibid.*, 136, 144, 189-190.

whole city is polled, abolitionism will be completely squelched in Springfield! Let us carry the home of Old Abe for McClellan.”⁸⁸

The Outcome

Springfield was mostly calm in the campaign’s final days in the face of this highly polarized atmosphere; this despite reports of violence erupting throughout the state and each party justifying aggressive tactics in the name of retaliation. At one point during the campaign, two newspaper boys, one from the *Journal* and the other from the *Register*, reportedly began wrestling in the streets after trying to outshout each other. The worst incident occurred on Election Day, however, when a McClellan backer shot a man for having “hurrahed for Lincoln.” Only later did the McClellan man learn that his victim shouted in jest; both men had cast ballots for the same nominee. Aside from that episode, the day passed by smoothly other than the heavy rains pouring down on those waiting outside the State House to vote. Some individuals reportedly stood in line upwards of an hour before casting their ballots, but that did not dampen the festive mood characteristic of a nineteenth-century Election Day. Bands performed throughout the day, parades marched the main streets, and, perhaps more importantly, all saloons remained closed per city ordinance. “Never since the organization of the government was an election carried on in Springfield with a more strict regard for decorum,” observed the *Register*.⁸⁹

Election returns arrived intermittently in the hours and days after the polls closed. In Washington, Lincoln paid close attention to results coming in from across the country, including those from his hometown. His secretary John G. Nicolay was in Springfield the night of the

⁸⁸ *Daily Illinois State Register*, October 29, 31, November 6, 1864.

⁸⁹ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, November 10, 1864; *Daily Illinois State Register*, November 9, 1864; Quinn, “Lincoln’s Springfield in the Civil War,” 73.

election sending telegraphs to his boss throughout the evening. State Auditor Jesse K. Dubois and Edward L. Baker, editor of the *Journal*, did the same. By the end of the night, they all concluded that Springfield had re-elected Lincoln, but by a mere twenty votes. This was eventually corrected to ten. Lincoln secured Illinois handily with nearly fifty-five percent of the vote, but won by less than one percent in Springfield, 1,324 votes to McClellan's 1,314.⁹⁰ The *Journal* blamed poor weather on the surprisingly narrow victory, but was excited by the outcome nonetheless. Despite "returns more meager than they otherwise would have been ... enough is known to determine" that Republicans had triumphed. "Old Abe is elected," Sarah Gregg proudly wrote in her November 11 journal entry. "Whoorah boys, whoorah, down with the traitor and up with the stars." From Mississippi, Mary Brayman was elated by the news back home. "Three cheers for Old Abe. Peace on earth and good will to all men except the rebs." Springfield was yet again the Home of Lincoln, if only barely.⁹¹

Local Democrats were in disbelief as the figures continued to pour in. "It will be remembered that we always received our worst reports first," the *Register* noted in an effort to console its base the day after the election. But the tide never turned, and Democrats learned in the following days that their party fared poorly throughout the state and the region. Lincoln's friend Shelby M. Cullom defeated fellow Springfielder John T. Stuart's reelection bid by "several hundred votes," in part because the latter displayed little interest in running again despite his party's persistence. Richard J. Oglesby won election as governor, and Republicans retook a majority in both houses of the Illinois Legislature. But it was Lincoln's reelection that

⁹⁰ See John G. Nicolay to Abraham Lincoln, November 8, 10, 1864, Lincoln Collection, LOC; Jesse K. Dubois to Abraham Lincoln, Tuesday, November 8, 14, 1864, Lincoln Collection, LOC; and Edward L. Baker to Abraham Lincoln, Tuesday, November 8, 9, 1864, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

⁹¹ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, November 9, 1864; *The Wartime Diary of Mrs. Sarah Gregg*, November 12, 1864, Sarah Gregg Collection, ALPLM; Mary Brayman to Ada Bailhache, November 16, 1864, Bailhache-Brayman Collection, ALPLM.

stung the most, so much so that the *Register* refused to mention his name in the aftermath. "It is needless to say that his election has filled our heart with gloom."⁹²

Yet, as with the case of most political defeats, the losing party tried to focus on positive results. Some Democrats reluctantly accepted the Republican argument that Army volunteers overwhelmingly favored Lincoln; but they also understood that Republicans needed soldiers to vote in order to secure Lincoln's reelection. The only way administration backers could accomplish this feat was through a manipulation of government resources, such as granting or extending furloughs and transferring men north on railroad lines that already gave priority to military personnel during the war. This abuse of power, as Democrats considered it, explained the large soldier presence in Springfield on Election Day:

"With an army of attaches to the numerous Federal offices, with the detachments of soldiers stationed at the capital; with the arsenal, the provost marshal general, the district provost, the quartermaster, commissary and adjutant general's departments, the machinery of Camp Butler and the military command of the district in their hands, they expected an immense majority.... And the result is that with a vote more than half as large again as the ordinary poll of the city, they go out with a beggarly majority of ten."

While historians no longer accept the argument that the soldier vote lifted Lincoln to reelection, veteran ballots certainly carried the President to victory in Springfield.⁹³ Local Democrats correctly highlighted their influence in the close contest, just as local Republicans had predicted ahead of the election. The owners of the *Register*, thwarted in their sole objective of putting a Democrat in the White House, suspended the press four days after the election and sold the paper two weeks later. They had purchased it just one year earlier.⁹⁴

⁹² *Daily Illinois State Register*, November 9, 10, 1864; Edward L. Baker to Abraham Lincoln, Tuesday, November 9, 1864, Lincoln Collection, LOC.

⁹³ McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire*, 493.

⁹⁴ *Daily Illinois State Register*, November 9, 10, 1864; *Daily Illinois State Journal*, November 14, 1864; Hubbard, "The Lincoln-McClellan Presidential Election in Illinois," 187.

Measured against the 1860 results, Democratic explanations for defeat in town were not far off. Four years earlier, Lincoln defeated Douglas 1,395 votes to 1,326. McClellan had few Springfield connections compared with Douglas yet garnered twelve more votes than the “Little Giant” did in 1860. Lincoln on the other hand *lost* 71 votes from the election four years earlier, not counting the 207 ballots that went to the two Southern candidates who also ran in 1860. Poor weather combined with a sporadic soldier turnout – some came home to vote while others remained in the field – likely contributed to the fewer number of ballots cast in 1864 (2,638) than in 1860 (2,721). If election results offer any correlation to population shifts, Springfield failed to keep up with the growth of surrounding communities who also had soldiers off at war. In the county, for example, Lincoln and McClellan received 356 more votes than four years ago between Lincoln and Douglas. Of those, McClellan received 3,945 while Lincoln trailed with 3,565, only nine better than his total in 1860. (McClellan compiled 389 more votes than Douglas’s 1860 county totals.) In other words, population growth occurred in Sangamon County while the state’s population grew from 1.8 million to 2.5 million during the war years.⁹⁵

In sum, Springfield residents were no more eager to lionize Lincoln in 1864 than they were in 1860. After more than three years of war questions remained of his ability to lead the country. Local Democrats still preferred McClellan over Lincoln despite unmistakable divisions within the party, and support for the president had weakened in surrounding areas over the previous four years. These regions, where population growth outpaced that of the capital city, began identifying more and more with the Democratic Party. These political and population trends in Central Illinois clashed with those occurring statewide at the same period. The Lincoln that eventually became Springfield’s, and the nation’s, martyr was still months away.

⁹⁵ Bridges, "Equality Deferred," 84; McLain, "A Study of the Population of Illinois from 1860-1870," 11; For election results, see Angle, "*Here I Have Lived*", 253, 287.

The other major consequence of the 1864 Republican wave was its impact on Illinois blacks. The subject of African Americans in the state, an obsession for Democrats two years earlier, had been relegated to a secondary issue during the campaign in favor of criticizing Lincoln's mishandling of the war. It was now front and center again. Not long after the election, Illinois's African Americans, under the leadership of Chicago's John Jones, began pushing the newly elected state leaders to repeal the Black Laws. These laws, put in place in 1853, prohibited blacks from settling permanently in the state, serving on juries, or testifying in court if a white individual was on trial. Efforts to repeal these laws began in 1856 with the formation of the Illinois State Repeal Association, founded by Jones and other prominent state African Americans. Jones travelled the state on behalf of the Association speaking to large groups and legislators urging action. He secured a meeting with outgoing Governor Yates, in line to become Illinois's next U.S. senator, handing the outgoing state executive a petition with thousands of signatures from Illinois's black and mulatto residents demanding repeal. Jones also spoke to a legislative committee in the State House, requesting "in the name of the great Republic, and all that is dear to a man in this life, erase those nefarious and unnecessary laws, and give us your protection, and treat us as you treat other citizens of the State. We ask only even handed justice, and all of our wrongs will be at an end by virtue of that act."⁹⁶

The Association increased its efforts in January 1865 to coincide with the opening of the new legislature, where Republicans again held majorities in both chambers for the first time since 1861. Supporters of repeal besieged lawmakers with petitions from across the state and beyond, including one from a soldier in the Seventh Illinois Infantry currently stationed in Savannah, Georgia, under General William T. Sherman's command. "I cannot but look upon the

⁹⁶ Bridges, "Equality Deferred," 83; Hubbard, *Illinois's War*, 175; James M. McPherson, *The Negro's Civil War: How American Blacks Felt and Acted During the War for the Union* (New York: Vintage, 2003), 257-258.

black laws of Illinois, as a system of injustice and inhumanity and unbecoming a civilized people, and a fit representative of the dark ages.” “So far as my observation goes,” he claimed, “the Negro will make a better citizen than the Southern refugee.” The level of support for repeal also surprised Springfield’s two newspapers. “There is an almost universal demand for the removal from our State Books of the foul blot known as the ‘Black Laws’,” the *Journal* asserted, while even the *Register* acknowledged that “petitions almost without number are constantly poured into the house and senate praying for repeal of the black laws.”⁹⁷

Contrary to the unity conveyed in these petitions, debate on both floors of the State Legislature was tense. Some Republican lawmakers expressed doubts, many of them similar to those coming from Democrats who worried over the expected hordes of freedmen converging on the state in the wake of emancipation. Nevertheless, both houses repealed the laws on February 4th, three days after the legislature made Illinois the first state to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery throughout the county. Springfield’s black community rejoiced over these two events, coming so close together. When news of the repeal went public, African-Americans congregated downtown to celebrate the news, firing off a cannon for every legislator who voted for repeal. They then carried their merriment over to the African Methodist Church where some of the most prominent black speakers addressed the assembly.⁹⁸ With little to celebrate during nearly four years of war – the Emancipation Proclamation being the lone exception – Springfield’s blacks now looked optimistically toward the future. But the struggle for equality was still be a long way off for Illinois’s African-Americans. The history of race relations in Springfield after the Civil War was not one of steady progress, even in the Home of

⁹⁷ J. G. Andrews to Richard Yates, January 3, 1865, Yates Collection, ALPLM; *Daily Illinois State Journal*, January 2, 1865; *Daily Illinois State Register*, January 12, 1865; Bridges, "Equality Deferred," 85-86.

⁹⁸ Quinn, "Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War," 80-81; Hubbard, *Illinois's War*, 175; Bridges, "Equality Deferred," 84-85.

the Great Emancipator. This was one more example of the contested legacy of Abraham Lincoln in his hometown.

CHAPTER SIX: “HOME IS THE MARTYR”

“When the sad tidings of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln were conveyed upon the wings of the telegraph to all parts of American on the morning of April 15, 1865, there was no place where it fell with such crushing weight as in the city of Springfield, where his trials and triumphs were personally known to all.”¹

Abraham Lincoln’s reputation in Springfield began its ascent once Union military victory appeared close at hand. The same happened across the North, especially after a shaky first presidential term, and his legacy would only grow in death.² Notwithstanding his distance from Springfield over the course of his presidency, both in the physical and in the abstract, this chapter argues that city leaders wasted no effort trying to reconnect the “Savior of the Union” with the place he called home. They immediately laid claim to his remains after news of his death spread throughout the region and the town’s fathers, local Republicans and Democrats alike, immediately and desperately tried to make Springfield his final resting place. They wanted to mourn their former neighbor and friend in person, but local officials were also interested in the fate of the community, mindful of the impact his burial would have for the city’s future. But as this chapter demonstrates, the process was difficult and complex. Multiple barriers and setbacks threatened to undo their vision at any moment, and though Lincoln’s body today lays in Springfield, leaders at the time had to make sobering concessions in order to achieve that goal, particularly on their preferred placement of a monument dedicated to the man. In the end, however, Springfielders who lived through this calamity and witnessed these various obstacles considered the city’s efforts worthwhile. The actions during the four-week period between General Robert E. Lee’s surrender and Appomattox to Lincoln’s Springfield burial on May 4 laid

¹ John Carroll Power, *Abraham Lincoln: His Great Funeral Cortège, From Washington City to Springfield, Illinois. With a History and Description of the National Lincoln Monument* (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois Journal Co., 1872), 9.

² Merrill D. Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), chapter one.

a foundation for successive generations to take up the task of identifying and creating a single narrative over their former neighbor's legacy with the Illinois capital. This chapter analyzes those tragic four weeks, the end of the Civil War for the populace of Springfield.

“Never did a people make history so fast”

The excitement began April 3. Sarah Gregg, head matron of the Camp Butler hospital, noted in her journal that despite “having rained all day[,] The gloom is dispelled by the news that Richmond and Petersburg were taken by Grant’s army. The cannon are booming in Springfield and the soldiers running around camp and cheering as though they were crazy, with the flags flying at every headquarters.”³ From the Governor’s Mansion Richard Oglesby observed residents “fireing salutes over the restoration of the Union, and the hearts of our people are throbing in unison with the reverberation of Grants Artillery.” Oglesby, a former commander in the Union Army and Illinois’s newest executive, sent a note to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton describing the scene. “Your dispatch announcing the fall of Richmond and Petersburg, and the war & of Lees Army, has electrified our people.... God bless Abraham Lincoln, E[dwin] M. Stanton, Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, and the soldiers of the Union.”⁴ Celebrations continued through the night, and city leaders scheduled a formal parade one week later to mark the occasion. Conveniently enough, on the morning of April 10, the date of the celebration, Illinois newspapers carried the following headline: “VICTORY! LEE SURRENDERED.” Communities across the North celebrated wildly, and Springfield was no exception. The war had been won, and as president and commander-in-chief, Lincoln received the bulk of credit for this accomplishment.

³ *The Wartime Diary of Mrs. Sarah Gregg*, April 3, 1865, Sarah Gregg Collection, ALPLM.

⁴ Richard J. Oglesby to Edwin M. Stanton, April 3, 1865, Oglesby Papers, ALPLM.

The scene that day resembled a national holiday. Flags waved throughout town, and “Business houses and private residences vied with each other in their display of patriotic emblems.”⁵ The Pioneer Fire Company launched a spontaneous parade that afternoon with celebrants falling in behind. An escorted mule carrying a dummy figure clasped a placard that read “Jeff. Davis’ last ride” on the front and “Lee’s End” on the back. Bands played throughout the evening, the music broken only by the occasional impromptu speech. Just outside of the city’s limits farmer John Edward Young heard “one continual roar” of cannon, firearms, and patriotic tunes. “Everybody is crased with joy and delight and drunk with excitement.” The teenage Democratic supporter Anna Ridgely concurred, merely “glad and happy at the prospect of the termination of this awful war.” As one historian put it, “Springfield went to bed drunk with joy.”⁶

Not everyone celebrated freely, in fact. There were consequences for those in town who had criticized the administration’s handling of the war at every step, most notably the Democratic *State Register*. When its front page flashed the exciting news from Virginia, the rival *State Journal* accused its rival of attempting to get on the right side of history, refusing to let its competitor suddenly suppress that fact.⁷ Later that day the Independence Day atmosphere broke into separate Republican and Democratic celebrations. Republicans met in front of the State House while Democrats chose the courthouse. Making matters worse, a group of soldiers tore down the speakers’ platform at the Democratic site and used the wood for their own personal

⁵ Power, *Abraham Lincoln: His Great Funeral Cortège, From Washington City to Springfield, Illinois. With a History and Description of the National Lincoln Monument*, 9.

⁶ "An Illinois Farmer during the Civil War," 130; Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon*, 164; Corneau, "A Girl in the Sixties," 442.

⁷ Quinn, "Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War," 84.

bonfire.⁸ Not even common joy in the war's ending could overcome the deep partisanship endured over the previous four years. News later that week would begin the process of changing that.

“Never did a people make history so fast, never did a people pass a week of such extremes of joy and sorrow, the Imortal Lincoln is Dead,” recalled John Armstrong, Springfield's postmaster on that week's whirlwind of emotions in the Illinois capital.⁹ Barely had the excitement over the fall of the rebellion calmed before the terrible reports of assassination arrived, and euphoria gave way to mourning. What should have been an ongoing celebration turned into devastation. Great rejoicing was “followed by a day of unparalleled gloom.... Such a day of gloom I think I never saw,” Anna Ridgely wrote in her journal.¹⁰ Lincoln's death stunned the Springfield community, just as it had in most of the North and even some parts of the South.

The 15th of April was a long day for the city. John Wilkes Booth shot the president the previous evening, and the first reports reached Springfield by telegraph at 3 o'clock the next morning. He was declared dead later that morning, and within two hours everyone in Springfield knew that he had passed away. The few businesses already opened for the day closed their doors and crowds swarmed the telegraph stations waiting, hoping for updates that might contradict earlier reports.¹¹

They never came, and the grief-stricken city struggled to make sense of this tragedy. Lincoln's last law partner William Herndon was in disbelief, unable to bring himself to work for weeks afterward. “The news of his going struck me dumb, the deed being so infernally wicked –

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ John Armstrong to Hon. William Marsh, Esq., May 7, 1865, John Armstrong Collection, ALPLM.

¹⁰ Corneau, "A Girl in the Sixties," 443.

¹¹ Angle, *Here I Have Lived*, 290.

so monstrous – so huge in consequences, that it was too large to enter my brain.... It is ... grievously sad to think of – one so good – so kind – so honest – so manly, & so *great*, taken off by the bloody murderous hand of an assassin.”¹² Soldiers at Camp Butler mourned for days, Sarah Gregg noted, and “every one feels as though they had lost a father.”¹³ Farmer John Edward Young raged over the “hellish act” and said the “news is so unexpected and startling that all stand appalled and stupefied with horror and indignation.”¹⁴ Anna Ridgely agreed with the latter sentiment, finding everyone in Springfield “oppressed and awed by such a solemn event.”¹⁵ Mary Hill Miner vividly recalled how the news prevented her father from fulfilling his daily routines that morning. Mary awoke “and wondered why my daddy did not come to dress me as was his custom.” Her mother took on this responsibility that morning, explaining that her father’s sadness was due to Lincoln’s death. Mary then “went out into the hall and found my splendid father, his hands behind his back and his head resting on his breast, paying no attention to anyone or anything. It was the first time in my life that my father did not take me in his arms and give me my morning hug and kiss.”¹⁶

The president’s assassination was not entirely devoid of political brinkmanship, but it had softened over the course of the previous week. This was subtle politicking. Though everyone in Springfield was privy to the news by mid-morning on the 15th, *Register* editor Edward L. Merritt rushed a special printing that Saturday afternoon carrying the most recent coverage up to that point. The timing was either intentional or coincidental. Merritt, who took ownership of the

¹² Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon*, 165.

¹³ *The Wartime Diary of Mrs. Sarah Gregg*, April 16, 1865, Sarah Gregg Collection, ALPLM.

¹⁴ "An Illinois Farmer during the Civil War," 130.

¹⁵ Octavia Roberts Corneau, ed., "A Girl in the Sixties: Excerpts from the Journal of Ridgely (Mrs. James L. Hudson)," *ibid.* 22, no. 3 (1929): 443.

¹⁶ Mary Miner Hill Recollections, March 21, 1923, Mary Miner Hill Collection, ALPLM.

newspaper after the 1864 presidential election, was obviously mindful of the local Republican criticism following Lee's surrender five days ago. Since neither press in town circulated a newspaper on Sundays, especially this Easter Sunday, Merritt risked withholding news of Lincoln's death until Monday, as the Republican *Journal* did. Had he waited those two days Merritt would end up competing with the pro-Lincoln organ's coverage of the episode. As the first newspaper to provide readers with the chain of events and published reports from Washington leaders; by unabashedly condemning the act; and by constantly heaping praise on the deceased president, Merritt began the process of distancing his party from its criticisms over the past four years toward Abraham Lincoln and preventing local Republicans from linking Democrats to the assassination. Helping his cause were statements describing Lincoln as "the kindly and indulgent man, beloved by his neighbors" and lamenting Springfield's loss of "the genial and kindly neighbor we once knew so well."¹⁷

Merritt also tried to present his organ as a supporter of the recently slain leader and added to Lincoln's growing mythical status. "Lincoln had piloted her through the fiercest fury of the storm; no new pilot can now guide the ark of our hopes so clearly, even through the smooth waters of approaching peace." In an editorial titled "The National Calamity," the author considered Lincoln's efforts to restore the Union comparable to Moses's life in the Old Testament. The great individual of the Hebrew Bible "had led God's people through the gloom and danger of the wilderness" and had also died "on the eve of realizing all that his hopes had pictured." With its opportune moment, the paper concluded that "the great [Stephen A.] Douglas has now a companion in immortality, and that when the roll of statesmen whose genius has left

¹⁷ *Daily Illinois State Register*, April 15, 1865.

its impress upon the destiny of the country shall be complete, no names will stand higher, or shine with purer lustre, than the two which blaze upon the escutcheon of Illinois.”¹⁸

This differed sharply from the *Journal*'s tone two days later. Springfield's Republican newspaper postponed printing an issue until Monday, pinning the delay on a telegraph mishap from its Washington correspondent that arrived too late to publish. Far from praising the deceased party leader, however, as the *Register* had done, editor Edward L. Baker expressed outrage and a desire for revenge in his opinion piece. The assassination and its impact on a people still coming to terms with the war's final throes “sent a trill of agony through millions of loyal hearts and shrouded a nation.” Worse still, “Nothing but the most uncontrollable and demoniac treason dares to assail a man so foully dealt with, or gloat over the ‘deep damnation of his taking off.’” And what explained this death? “It was Slavery that conceived the fearful deed; it was Slavery that sought and found the willing instrument and sped the fatal ball; it is Slavery alone that will justify the act.” Instead of heaping tributes on the slain leader, Springfield's Republican organ directed its ire toward the culprit that had caused the war and took the life of a president.¹⁹

These competing reactions aside, Springfielders of all political stripes reflected on one particular moment that brought unity to the city. Lincoln's Springfield Farewell address four years earlier was resurrected and added to his legendary status in town, aided in part by both newspapers publishing the speech. The two organs emphasized the last two sentences of Lincoln's prophetic statement: “With those few words I must leave you – FOR HOW LONG I KNOW NOT. Friends, one and all, I must now bid you an affectionate farewell.”²⁰

¹⁸ *Daily Illinois State Register*, April 15, 1865.

¹⁹ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, April 17, 1865.

²⁰ *Daily Illinois State Register*, April 17, 1865; *Daily Illinois State Journal*, April 17, 1865.

“He was one of us”

Not a piece of black material could be purchased after 10 o’clock that morning, residents having snatched it all up from the few local businesses that stayed open and had any in stock.²¹ Store and homeowners outfitted their dwellings in all manner of black, and a dark banner waved at half-mast from the flagpole atop the dome of the State House. Springfield “put on sack cloth and ashes,” recalled one observer, “and went into mourning, for Abraham Lincoln, her beloved citizen, was dead.”²² The “whole city presented a funeral aspect, as if the Death Angel had taken a member from every family. Never was there a day of such universal solemnity and sadness seen,” explained a reporter from the *Chicago Times*.²³

Later that morning and in the days that followed, the Union League, the Fenian Brotherhood, local lawyers, and Springfield’s black community gathered in their respective meeting places, writing and adopting resolutions honoring the martyred Lincoln.²⁴ One Masonic lodge in town acknowledged that even though he was never a member, Lincoln’s decision “to postpone his application for the honors of Masonry, lest his motives should be misconstrued, is in the highest degree honorable to his memory.”²⁵ Additionally, Mayor J. S. Vredenburg ordered an emergency session of the city council. Vredenburg, a Democrat, wanted the body’s meeting to set an example that the larger community could put aside its past differences and display unity for the man “we all knew – and all who knew him loved as a citizen and a friend.”

²¹ Mary Miner Hill Recollections, March 21, 1923, Mary Miner Hill Collection, ALPLM.

²² Edward L. Merritt, "Recollections of the Part Springfield Bore in the Obsequies of Abraham Lincoln," *Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society* 14(1910): 179.

²³ *Chicago Times*, April 17, 1865, in Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon*, 164.

²⁴ Angle, "Here I Have Lived", 290.

²⁵ Resolutions from Tyrian Lodge, No. 33, Springfield, Illinois, April 17, 1865, *Freemasons' Monthly Magazine*, May 1865.

Lincoln's death may have emblemized "all the losses of the war," historian Drew Gilpin Faust surmised, but "We of this City have special cause to mourn, for he was one of us," Vredenburg noted in his order. Pushing this inclusive point further, one of the city's aldermen offered a resolution suggesting that council members "meet with our citizens at the State Capitol at 12 o'clock this PM for the purpose of arranging to make the sorrowful occasion a proper one." Councilmembers singled out some of Springfield's prominent businessmen, political leaders, and known friends of Lincoln in its "PUBLIC MEETING" notice.²⁶

A large crowd had assembled around the State House by noon, eager for words of comfort but also insight into how the city planned to observe the occasion. Shelby Cullom, Springfield's congressional representative in Washington and a close Republican ally of Lincoln's, called the makeshift meeting to order and offered a few opening statements:

We are met together to mourn over a great calamity. Abraham Lincoln, your fellow citizen, who went out from this city four years ago, called by the American people to preside over the nation, is now no more. He has been stricken down by the hand of a dastardly, bloody assassin.

Later, John T. Stuart, Lincoln's old law partner and the former Democratic Representative who won his seat in 1862 campaigning against emancipation, read a list of resolutions prepared by local leaders. These resolutions emphasized the former president's affiliation with the community, underlining the fact that "his neighbors and friends, without distinction of party" had forgotten past differences after "the unexampled success of our arms" and now united behind Lincoln's "policy of restoration and union."²⁷

Furthermore, the resolutions tasked the city council to coordinate with the Illinois governor "with a view of bringing hither his remains for interment." The town that raised this

²⁶ Records of the First Presbyterian Church, page 3, Box 5, Lincoln Memorial Collection, ALPLM; "PUBLIC MEETING," April 15, 1865, Lincoln Collection, ALPLM; Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 156.

²⁷ *Daily Illinois State Register*, April 15, 1865

individual, aiding him in his desire to become president (despite only a slight majority casting their ballots for him in each election) believed now it was only appropriate that he be buried among friends and neighbors. The *Journal* raised this point earlier that day claiming that Lincoln “wished, at the last, to have his body interred here, in the home of his youth, where ‘the most sacred ties of life were assumed.’” “We trust what seemed his wishes in this regard may be respected,” the Republican editor reiterated. Based on these demonstrations of support and the town’s role in Lincoln’s personal growth and development, it was fitting that, according to the resolutions, “this ‘City of the Dead’ should be the final resting place of all that on earth remains of him that is mortal.”²⁸

As it happens, this effort was already underway in Washington. Governor Richard Oglesby and a party of Illinois politicians departed for Washington one day after Lee’s surrender and arrived on April 14, the day Lincoln was assassinated. Oglesby was one of the last to meet with the president before the latter left to attend the play at Ford’s Theatre.²⁹ Very early the next morning, the Illinois governor was near Lincoln’s deathbed after the heinous attack on the president’s life. Before the Springfield resolutions reached them on the 15th, members of the state’s political leadership met in Senator Richard Yates’s Washington chambers that morning to consider their role going forward. Similar to those back in Springfield, they also believed Illinois deserved recognition and that the remains be placed in “the Capital of the State, so long his residence.” Unable to meet with Mary Lincoln, who remained secluded in her White House room and refused all but a select few visitors, Oglesby and a small Illinois delegation secured a

²⁸ *Daily Illinois State Register*, April 15, 1865; *Daily Illinois State Journal*, April 17, 1865; Merritt, "Recollections of the Part Springfield Bore in the Obsequies of Abraham Lincoln," 179-181; Michael J. Howlett, *Keepers of the Seal: A History of the Secretaries of State of Illinois and How Their Office Grew* (Springfield, Illinois: Authority of State of Illinois, 1977), 74-75.

²⁹ In fact, Oglesby apparently turned down Lincoln’s invitation to accompany him to the show, which he regretted for the rest of his life, believing he could have protected the President.

meeting with Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and presented their case for a Springfield burial. Stanton relayed the request to Mary Lincoln, which she approved, and Oglesby and his cohorts promptly wired the good news back to city leaders.³⁰ Having gained consent to inter the martyred chief's remains, these men began the process of reshaping the Illinois capital city's future, even though that process would face further challenges in the weeks ahead.

Springfield's Boosters

In the days after Lincoln's death, the citizens of Springfield waited nervously for developments from Washington. Preachers across the North scrapped their Easter Sunday sermons and lectured on the continued sorrow to overflowing congregations. Some grew anxious when the *New York Times* reported that Lincoln's body would be placed in the Congressional Cemetery in Washington, and once arrangements had been settled, would "hereafter [be] taken to Mr. Lincoln's home at Springfield, Illinois."³¹ But that was premature. Governor Oglesby's telegraphs confirming Lincoln's body would indeed be buried in Springfield reached town on the 18th, followed by word that the Funeral Train carrying his casket would arrive on May 3 after a journey closely retracing his Inaugural train's path from four years earlier.³²

Elated with the news but also aware that they only had two weeks to prepare for a grand funeral ceremony, residents immediately set down to work. A group comprised of state officials, city council members, and other prominent local citizens gathered in the State House and created a Committee of Arrangements whose mission was to prepare Springfield for the arrival of the

³⁰ Plummer, *Lincoln's Rail-Splitter*, 107-109.

³¹ *New York Times*, April 16, 1865; Angle, "Here I Have Lived", 290.

³² James T. Hickey, "Springfield, May, 1865," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 58, no. 1 (Spring 1965): 28.

body and the large crowd expected. From there they formed various subcommittees, everyone aware that this would be the biggest event in Springfield's history outside of becoming the state capital in 1837.³³ Between the time the town learned that Lincoln's burial would take place in Springfield and up to the train's arrival on May 3, *Register* editor Edward Merritt recalled that the "Capital of Illinois had made elaborate preparations for the last offices of the dead. To consummate a becoming tribute of an affectionate people, money, skill, patience, labor, nothing was spared that Springfield's love offering should be worthy of her great dead."³⁴

The most pressing question was where to bury the remains. There was too little time to erect a monument and few desired to have him placed at Oak Ridge Cemetery, a spot two miles north of the downtown district that had gradually become the preferred burial site for residents since its opening fifteen years earlier. Organizers settled on a temporary vault to be built on land owned by the prominent Mather family. Not only was this land near the commercial and political heart of Springfield, it was also one of the highest points in town. People from nearly every region of the city would be able to view the vault, and eventually the monument, built on the spot. Train passengers traveling through the area could not avoid spotting it from the tracks, a point not lost on community boosters in their quest to draw visitors to the region. The idea grew traction around town, aided in part by the *Journal's* unsubtle nudging. The "beautiful square now occupied by the residence of Mrs. Mather" would "probably be selected [as the grave site], as the grounds are singularly well adapted to the purpose," the editor penned. "It is suggested that the whole square be purchased and properly improved and beautified. It lies in full view of the Chicago and Alton Railroad, and would be convenient access to visitors."³⁵ Even before the

³³ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, April 18, 1865.

³⁴ Merritt, "Recollections of the Part Springfield Bore in the Obsequies of Abraham Lincoln," 181.

³⁵ *Daily Illinois State Journal*, April 18, 1865.

decision had been settled a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune* offered his opinion that “The last resting place of Mr. Lincoln will be the Mecca of millions of people, and for all time the spot will be looked on as almost holy ground.” Furthermore, its location in the center of Springfield made it “accessible to all classes of people, rich and poor.” Alternatively, he continued, “Oak Ridge is distant about three miles, and many times during the year very hard to reach.”³⁶

These statements make clear that locals had more in mind than properly burying a fallen friend. Understated in these comments was the added need to promote the city’s image at a time it faced uncertainty. Town leaders worried their community may have reached its populace peak and become stagnant, or worse, was on the verge of moving in the opposite direction. These concerns overlapped with the alarming prospect of losing the state capital. The importance leaders placed on the appropriate location of Lincoln’s remains therefore took on added meaning. That explains why the city’s political and business leaders collaborated on this project due to its long-term consequences.³⁷

Historians refer to this mid-nineteenth century trend as “boosterism,” and Lincoln’s death occurred at a time when Springfield’s fathers were again considering ways to boost their community, an interest few local leaders ever stopped caring about since the seat of Illinois’s government moved there in the 1830s. In fact, Lincoln had been part of this movement serving as a local trustee and a state legislature shortly after the transfer of government in the state.³⁸ But by

³⁶ *Chicago Tribune*, April 18, 1865, found in Jason Emerson, *Giant in the Shadows: The Life of Robert T. Lincoln* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 2012), 111.

³⁷ A state census conducted in 1865 recorded Springfield’s population spiked by nearly 60 percent (over five thousand residents) since the federal census of 1860, but these mid-decade censuses raise questions over accuracy. They rarely went into as much depth as the decade reports, and the 1865 records took place with military and war-related personnel streaming in and out of the capital city. Records of the First Presbyterian Church, page 6, Box 5, Lincoln Memorial Collection, ALPLM; Power, *History of Springfield, Illinois*, 17; “The Charter, With the Several Amendments Thereto; Various State Laws Relating to the City, and the Revised Ordinances of Springfield, Illinois,” (Springfield, Illinois: Steam Press of Baker & Phillips, 1865).

³⁸ Winkle, *The Young Eagle*, 179.

the time Lincoln left for Washington, city leaders had reason for concern. The state's overall population ballooned in the 1850s and 1860s, and the current confines of the State House in Springfield failed to accommodate this growth. Local historian John Carroll Power later recalled that the increased size of the state government "had outgrown its public buildings so much that its records were unsafe, and many branches of its official business had to be transacted in rented buildings, where much of its valuable property was exposed at all times to the dangers of destruction by fire." As a result, Power went on, "There began to be intimations thrown out that when the question did come up for legislation, other important towns would endeavor to bring influences to bear in favor of re-location and removal."³⁹

Moreover, most of Illinois's population increase occurred in cities such as Chicago, Quincy, and Peoria. Springfield, on the other hand, experienced comparatively minimal growth, and local boosters agonized over the town's ability to attract new residents while preventing current ones from moving elsewhere. They were concerned in 1861 over the possible relocation of a Lutheran university in town, which eventually closed its doors six years later.⁴⁰ Potentially losing the capital put them on alert. From Washington, Shelby M. Cullom, the Springfield district's recently-elected member to the U.S. House of Representatives, asked former Illinois Secretary of State and current Springfield inhabitant Ozias M. Hatch in January: "How is the Capitol question?"⁴¹ *State Journal* proprietor Edward L. Baker wrote to his associate William Bailhache in early February 1865 that "The Capital is still here but there is a d[evi]l of a pressure to take it from us. I think, however, it is safe."⁴² Boosters had a sizeable stake in community

³⁹ Power, *History of Springfield, Illinois*, 18.

⁴⁰ *Daily Illinois State Register*, March 8, 1861.

⁴¹ Shelby M. Cullom to O. M. Hatch, January 1865[?], O. M. Hatch Collection, ALPLM.

⁴² Edward L. Baker to William Bailhache, February 2, 1865, Bailhache-Brayman Collection, ALPLM.

expansion and development, often investing their own time and capital into this effort. This occurred throughout the frontier and in places all over Illinois that created competitive rivalries with nearby towns and cities.⁴³ Understanding this, John C. Power explained, Springfield “awakened to its responsibilities when the demand for a removal of the capital was renewed by rivals like Peoria, Decatur, and Jacksonville.”⁴⁴

The ugly confrontations between soldiers and residents notwithstanding, the city had proven itself as a capable military headquarters after four years of war. Few legislators raised the subject of relocation during the conflict, and only in the war’s twilight did state leaders address the growing need for new accommodations. Yet Lincoln’s death provided a glimmer of hope that the community might be able to continue to grow despite the prospect of losing the State House. Alternatively, securing Lincoln’s final resting spot might bolster the city’s image, making it an attractive option when it came time to decide where to build the new Capitol building.⁴⁵ Illinois’s first two capitals, Kaskaskia and Vandalia, struggled to attract new residents after the legislature left town. To avoid a similar fate, Springfield’s fathers believed Lincoln’s killing was an opportunity to build for the city’s future by honoring its past association with the fallen “Savior of the Union.”⁴⁶

⁴³ Don Harrison Doyle, *The Social Order of a Frontier Community: Jacksonville, Illinois, 1825-70* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 18, 225-226. Doyle's work analyzes the growth and development of Jacksonville, Illinois, a town thirty miles west of Springfield. He follows the efforts of local boosters to create - but ultimately fail to build - a large city in the emerging Mid-West. In order to achieve this goal, boosters set their respective communities against others in the area with the goal of obtaining one or more of the following institutions: the state capital, a state asylum, a county seat, railroad lines, and the university, as examples. Doyle's book has helped shape my understanding of the region during this period.

⁴⁴ Cole, *The Era of the Civil War*, 351.

⁴⁵ The city council presented its application for a new State House – located on the Mather Lot, interestingly enough – to the General Assembly in 1867. State legislators selected Springfield’s proposal on February 24, 1867, and construction began later that year. Workers completed the project in 1888. For more on this subject, see Power, *History of Springfield, Illinois*, 18.

⁴⁶ Ironically, mid-nineteenth century boosters throughout the country promoted nearby rural cemeteries, such as Oak Ridge, to attract newcomers to their communities. The best example of this was Mount Auburn Cemetery near

What better way to achieve both ends than to bury his remains in the City Square?

Leaders settled on the Mather Lot location shortly after receiving confirmation that Lincoln would be buried in Springfield. The city appropriated \$20,000, primarily from bonds, “to defray the funeral expense” while the community donated an additional \$50,000. A local mason and bricklayer offered to erect the vault free of charge, and he along with his staff immediately set to work.⁴⁷ With less than two weeks before the train carrying Lincoln’s body scheduled to arrive, residents throughout town began preparing for the most important funeral in Springfield’s history. Unfortunately for them, many of those plans would be changed or scrapped altogether. Nobody, as it turns out, had asked Mary Lincoln where she preferred to see her dead husband laid to rest.

“Battle of the Gravesite”

Mary Lincoln was, of course, still despondent from her husband’s death when she learned of the city’s plan to bury Lincoln’s remains in a tomb on the Mather spot. She remained isolated in her room at the White House for days, unable to attend the funeral services in Washington on April 19. The newly sworn in president, Andrew Johnson, allowed her to stay there as long as she needed. She refused to leave her bed when the casket carrying Lincoln’s body boarded the Funeral Train that would terminate in Springfield two weeks later. Mary initially preferred to see her dead husband buried in Chicago or in the empty crypt prepared for George Washington’s body located in the Capitol building in Washington, after he was interred next to his wife at

Boston. See David Charles Sloane, *The Last Great Necessity: Cemeteries in American History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), especially chapter three.

⁴⁷ *Springfield, Ill. City Council Bond Register, 1837-1886 & City Ordinances for Bond Issues*, undated, 96; Records of the First Presbyterian Church, page 5, Box 5, Lincoln Memorial Collection, ALPLM; Quinn, "Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War," 86; Plummer, *Lincoln's Rail-Splitter*, 110.

Mount Vernon.⁴⁸ She accepted the Springfield option after reassurances that her dead son Willie, who died in the White House in February 1862, would accompany the traveling party and be interred there as well. When she settled on Springfield, Mary Lincoln was primarily concerned that her immediate family – her husband, herself, and her sons – would eventually be buried together.⁴⁹

She therefore balked after learning that Springfield leaders intended to place Lincoln's body in a specially designed vault on the Mather Lot. Mary Lincoln understood that the vault and eventual monument would hold only her husband's remains, separated from her and their children. This was, of course, the goal for planners in Springfield, and what many at the time referred to as the "Battle of the Gravesite" was a contest over Lincoln's body and, consequently, the rights to his legacy.⁵⁰ City leaders and residents believed they had a civic right to the martyr's remains, particularly since they had molded the man into the icon he would become in death. Alternatively, Mary Lincoln defended her spousal claims in determining her dead husband's final resting place. This, in some ways, was the last "battle" of the Civil War for the citizens of Springfield.

The roots of this conflict began before Lincoln's presidential candidacy. Mary Lincoln's reputation in Springfield waned as her husband's name spread nationally in the late-1850s. Biographer Jean H. Baker noted that her subject's "circle of friends dwindled" due to her political relationships in the decade before becoming the first lady. Mrs. Lincoln was also often "so incurably hostile" to some in Springfield that she repeatedly jeopardized once-friendly

⁴⁸ The struggles over burying George Washington in the nation's capital can be found in Rubil Morales-Vázquez, "Redeeming a Sacred Pledge: The Plans to Bury George Washington in the Nation's Capital," in Kenneth R. Bowling and Donald R. Kennon, eds., *Establishing Congress: The Removal to Washington, D.C., and the Election of 1800* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), 148-189.

⁴⁹ Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln*, 248; Plummer, *Lincoln's Rail-Splitter*, 109.

⁵⁰ Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln*, 257.

relationships. In January 1861, just weeks before she and her family departed Springfield for the White House, Mary traveled to New York to upgrade her wardrobe to fit her new status. Mercy Levering Conkling, once Mary's closest friend in town, criticized the excursion and later referred to the president's wife as "Our Royal Highness" behind her back. Many Springfielders, male and female, shared this opinion.⁵¹ The war years saw Mary Lincoln's image in Springfield decline further. Editors Justin G. Turner and Linda Levitt Turner published a collection of Mary Lincoln's letters during her lifetime, and a scan of her wartime correspondence reveals a reduction in dialogue with Springfield friends during her time in the White House. She wrote the majority of these letters in 1861, which, coincidentally enough, corresponded with the six-month period her cousin and close Springfield friend, Elizabeth Grimsley, resided in the White House at Mary's request. After that, Mary Lincoln rapidly distanced herself from the Illinois community where she had lived for more than twenty years.⁵²

The Springfield citizenry instantly began associating themselves with the dead president upon receiving news of the assassination, a stark contrast during the previous four years. They rallied behind his burial in town and justified it on conversations he had toward the end of his life. Two weeks before his death, John T. Stuart visited the White House and asked the president about his plans after leaving office. Lincoln confirmed his expectation "to go back and make my home in Springfield for the rest of my life" despite his wife's wishes.⁵³ Stuart relayed this anecdote to the crowd that had gathered in the City Square after news of Lincoln's death reached the Illinois capital. Lincoln also expressed a desire to get away from the constant demands placed

⁵¹ Ibid, 151, 166, 192; Clinton, *Mrs. Lincoln, A Life*, 119.

⁵² Also see Justin G. Turner and Linda Levitt Turner, eds., *Mary Todd Lincoln: Her Life and Letters* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972); Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln*, 205.

⁵³ Burlingame, *An Oral History of Abraham Lincoln*, 14.

upon him with a visit back home. In 1862, Springfield Baptist minister and former neighbor Noyes W. Miner visited Washington and Lincoln expressed to him a desire to “take my neck from under the yoke, and go home with you to Springfield and live as I was accustomed to, in peace with my friends, than to endure this harassing kind of life.”⁵⁴ He and Mary might do some traveling after his second term, Lincoln informed Miner, but this only meant they would “not return *immediately* to Springfield.”⁵⁵ Lincoln also tried to settle the issue after Mary expressed her desire to move to Chicago following the presidency. “No, we are going back to Springfield,” he told her. “That is our home, and there it will continue to be.”⁵⁶ The community held onto Abraham Lincoln’s words as they prepared their city for his final resting place. At the city council’s special meeting on April 19th where members approved using city funds to pay for the funeral, the body justified this decision since it had been Lincoln’s, as well as the nation’s, preference that Springfield was “selected as the final resting place of his mortal remains.”⁵⁷

Mary Lincoln had a different recollection. She persisted on Oak Ridge Cemetery because it contrasted with the bustle of the downtown district. In fact, Mary Lincoln agreed on a Springfield burial based on Oak Ridge’s rural features. The cemetery had opened only five years

⁵⁴ Michael Burlingame, *The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 252.

⁵⁵ Rev. N. W. Miner, “Personal Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln,” July 10, 1882, N. W. Miner, Collection, ALPLM. Emphasis added.

⁵⁶ Burlingame, *The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln*, 311.

⁵⁷ Records of the First Presbyterian Church, page 5, Box 5, Lincoln Memorial Collection, ALPLM. Despite multiple examples demonstrating Lincoln’s preference to move back to Springfield, he was aware of the city’s unpleasant features. One of his secretaries, John Hay, recounted a joke his boss told in November 1863. Lincoln recalled a conversation his friend, Jesse K. Dubois, Illinois’ State Auditor, had with a travelling preacher. The preacher requested use of the House of Representatives Hall in the State House to deliver a religious lecture. Lincoln continued, according to Hay’s assessment, “‘What’s it about,’ asked Jesse. ‘The Second Coming of Christ,’ said the parson. ‘Nonsense’ roared Uncle Jesse, ‘If Christ had been to Springfield once, and got away, he’d be damned clear of coming again.’” See Michael Burlingame and John R. Turner Ettliger, *Inside Lincoln's White House: The Complete Civil War Diary of John Hay* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 312, n. 138. Dubois was elected president of the committee in Springfield charged with arranging Lincoln’s burial in town.

earlier and James C. Conkling emphasized the location's openness and natural element in his dedication speech. "Far away from the haunts of busy life; far distant from the ceaseless rush of active enterprise; far removed from the giddy whirl of fashion [and] folly," the area was the most appropriate fitting for "the City of the Dead."⁵⁸ It was also the type of setting Abraham Lincoln would have preferred, Mary argued. Recalling a visit to Virginia toward the end of the war, Lincoln pointed toward a peaceful spot of land along the James River. He told Mary, "You are younger than I, and you will survive me. When I am gone, lay my remains in some quiet place like this." Not only did Oak Ridge fit this description, but Mary also referred to this conversation with her husband – similar to what Springfield leaders had done – to demonstrate that the martyred president entrusted his wife to determine his appropriate final resting place. Finally, Oak Ridge Cemetery could hold her entire family – three of whom were now dead – together again at some point.⁵⁹

Mary's demands were simple: if Springfield wanted her husband's remains, she would dictate their placement. As historian Jean H. Baker pointed out, "Lincoln might be Springfield's local hero and Illinois's first President, but he was Mary Todd's husband."⁶⁰ Similarly, she

⁵⁸ "Address delivered by James C. Conkling at the dedication of Oak Ridge Cemetery, May 24, 1860," James C. Conkling Collection, ALPLM. Charles H. Lanphier, longtime Democrat and editor of the *Register*, convinced the City Council in 1855 to purchase seventeen acres of undeveloped land north of town for the purpose of a cemetery. That a Democratic editor who spent his career challenging Republican policies proposed a cemetery that would hold the remains of the most recognizable Republican and attract visitors from across the world was but one of the ironies of this episode. See Thomas J. Craughwell, *Stealing Lincoln's Body* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 22.

⁵⁹ Robert Lincoln, the only child to reach adulthood, was buried in Arlington National Cemetery per his widow's demands. See Emerson, *Giant in the Shadows*, 416. The Lincolns' second son, Edward, died in 1850 just shy of his fourth birthday, and was buried in Springfield's Hutchinson Cemetery, a few blocks from the Lincoln home. Hutchinson Cemetery was the first private burial ground in town, opening in 1843, and it served as one of the major cemeteries in town for nearly two decades. Little Eddie's body joined Willie's and his father's in the temporary vault in 1865, roughly the same time other bodies were removed from Hutchinson Cemetery and reinterred in Oak Ridge Cemetery. See Harry E. Pratt, "Little Eddie Lincoln - "We Miss Him Very Much"," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 47, no. 3 (Autumn 1954): 304-305.

⁶⁰ Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln*, 252. In an 1866 interview with William Herndon, Mary Lincoln later added, "Mr Lincoln up to 1865 wanted to live in Springfield and be buried there – Changed his notion where to live – never

refused to allow those she no longer counted on as friends to determine the most appropriate setting, holding “a strong repugnance to ... those who had abused and vilified him while living and who always considered his elevation to the Presidency a personal injustice to themselves.” Mary Lincoln understood the scheme of her former neighbors and her husband’s former colleagues, lashing out against those who decided “where his remains should repose, and taking so prominent a part in doing honor to his memory.”⁶¹ And in this she was correct, aware that many now lauding her husband’s life had been less than enthusiastic over some of his actions before and during his presidency.

When Mary Lincoln learned of the intended vault for her husband on the Mather Lot, she nearly revoked her original consent to bury his body in Springfield and thus deprive the city of its sole objective. She was unfazed by the town’s fathers – now organized under the National Lincoln Monument Association (NLMA), whose mission was to raise funds for the eventual tomb – and their efforts to dictate Lincoln’s burial site, and she refused to back down. Five days before the funeral train was set to arrive in Springfield, Mary’s cousin John B. S. Todd sent a telegraph from Washington to her cousin John T. Stuart expressing her determination “that the remains of the President shall be deposited in Oak Ridge Cemetery, and nowhere else – see that this is done.” Todd sent a follow-up telegraph to Stuart two days later with a similar warning and nearly the exact same wording, adding, “This is Mrs. Lincoln’s fixed determination.” For good measure, Todd sent one more telegraph the following day to Clark M. Smith, Mary’s brother-in-law and a Springfield storeowner, alerting the NLMA of Mrs. Lincoln’s requirement “that the remains of the President are placed in the vault of Oak Ridge Cemetery and nowhere else.” She

settled on any place particularly – intended moving & travelling some.” Wilson and Davis, *Herndon's Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements About Abraham Lincoln*, 359.

⁶¹ Wayne C. Temple, "The Mathers and Lincoln's Unused Tomb," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 103, no. 3/4 (Fall-Winter 2010): 369.

also urged Anson G. Henry, her physician and one of the few Springfield friends who stayed with her after the assassination, to write a letter reiterating her demands. “[I]f her wishes and directions in regard to her Husband’s remains are not complied with, she will remove them to Chicago next June,” lining up with her planned move there.⁶²

Her resolve paid off because the group conceded to her demands, or at least appeared so. John T. Stuart wired Secretary of War Edwin Stanton on April 29 with news that the association “instruct me to say that the wishes of Mrs. Lincoln shall be complied with.”⁶³ But they were merely appeasing her. They resolved to hold the funeral *ceremony* at Oak Ridge, but the eventual *monument* would still be placed on the Mather land without her knowledge. They would transfer Lincoln’s body to the monument after its completion, reasoning that once the casket reached Springfield it became city property. Members of the NLMA could sacrifice the funeral arrangements but then proceed with their plans to bury the remains in the part of town they still preferred.

Mary again discovered their plan and remained firm, again threatening to have the body interred in Chicago. The Lincoln’s eldest son Robert, who helped convince his mother to have the funeral held in Springfield and not Chicago, now sided with his mother. On the day he left Washington to attend the ceremonies in Illinois, he wrote Governor Oglesby, “There seems to be a disposition at Springfield to disregard my mother’s wishes in regard to the interment. Both the temporary *and* final interment must take place in the Oak Ridge Cemetery. We have reasons for

⁶² John B. S. Todd to John T. Stuart, April 28, April 30, May 1, 1865, John B. S. Todd Collection, ALPLM; Anson G. Henry to John Williams, May 1, 1865, Anson G. Henry Collection, ALPLM.

⁶³ Temple, "The Mathers and Lincoln's Unused Tomb," 369.

not wishing to use the Mather place for either purpose and we expect and demand that our wishes be consulted.”⁶⁴

Back in Springfield preparations were well underway for the funeral train’s arrival. Edmond Beall, a carpenter from Alton, Illinois, traveled to the Illinois capital to assist with the final arrangements. He found “great sorrow” after arriving in town and a community that “seemed as if they had lost all heart.” Focusing all of their energies into the funeral preparations was a useful distraction for residents, as well as a way to take their minds off the sadness, if only temporarily. Considering they were about to receive and bury a well-respected neighbor and martyred president, the Springfield public ably dealt with the magnanimity of Lincoln’s death on the eve of his body’s arrival.⁶⁵ “Oh, the terrible days that followed,” young Mary Miner recalled, but “How the Committee did work to get things in readiness for the funeral.”⁶⁶

A substantial portion of that work occurred on the Mather Lot vault. The NLMA had ignored her initial notices, thus eliciting those follow-up letters from friends and family writing on her behalf. The group originally attempted to change her opinion. Writing on behalf of the group, John T. Stuart telegraphed that progress on the Mather Lot tomb had “gone too far to be changed,” and it was best to stick with the original plans. Having failed that, members hoped the former first lady might lose interest in the plan if they proceeded quietly. As a precaution, workers were placed at each site after Mary Lincoln’s repeated threats, but Springfield’s newly sworn in mayor momentarily put a halt to that. Thomas J. Dennis, also a member of the NLMA, ordered an immediate suspension of “all work, and preparations in Oak Ridge Cemetery for the

⁶⁴ Emerson, *Giant in the Shadows*, 112.

⁶⁵ Edmond Beall, "Recollections of the Assassination and Funeral of Abraham Lincoln," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 5, no. 4 (January 1913): 489.

⁶⁶ Mary Miner Hill Recollections, March 21, 1923, Mary Miner Hill Collection, ALPLM.

reception of the mortal remains of our late President Abraham Lincoln, until further orders.”⁶⁷

The men of the NLMA again dismissed Mary Lincoln’s wishes, believing that their preferences carried more weight in determining Lincoln’s final resting spot.

“Then the trouble began.” That was Edmond Beall’s description of the town’s reaction to Mary Lincoln’s ultimatum. Two things occurred when word of her stipulation spread throughout town. First, work on the Mather Lot slowed considerably – but not halted – as focus shifted to the Oak Ridge site with only a few days before the funeral.⁶⁸ Second, what little respect Mary Lincoln possessed in town virtually disappeared. The *Journal* wrote that her insistence produced a “feeling of profound regret among a large majority of our citizens.”⁶⁹ Julia Kirby visited from Jacksonville, Illinois to attend the services, and the daughter of former Governor Joseph Duncan still counted many friends from her time in Springfield as a youth. She expressed her displeasure of Mary Lincoln’s actions in a letter to her brother after the funeral. “It seems strange that Mrs. Lincoln should act the way she has after all they have done,” referring to the city’s progress on the burial arrangements on the Mather Lot. “The vault is complete and Abraham Lincoln engraved in the arch over the door, and a lovelier spot could not be found in Springfield.”⁷⁰ Henry P.H. Bromwell of Charleston was in the city before the funeral and witnessed some of the last-minute preparations. He sensed “rage” throughout Springfield after the town received Mary Lincoln’s demands. “[A]ll the hard stories that ever were told about her are told over again,” he told his family back home. “She has no friends here.”⁷¹

⁶⁷ Emerson, *Giant in the Shadows*, 111.

⁶⁸ Beall, "Recollections of the Assassination and Funeral of Abraham Lincoln," 489; Plummer, *Lincoln's Rail-Splitter*, 110.

⁶⁹ Quinn, "Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War," 88.

⁷⁰ Julia D. Kirby to Joseph Duncan, May 7, 1865, found in Pratt, *Concerning Mr. Lincoln*, 133.

⁷¹ Henry P. H. Bromwell to Family, April 30, 1865, found in *ibid*, 129.

The “battle” prolonged into the summer after Mary moved to Chicago. From there she received updates that the NLMA planned to move forward with the monument now that they had possession of the key to the temporary vault holding Lincoln’s coffin. Governor Oglesby expressed the view, shared by others in the city, that “Springfield claims his as her own, and will not give him up.”⁷² Work on the Mather Lot resumed after the funeral, but Mary renewed her threats once she learned of the NLMA’s ongoing intentions. She therefore gave the group a June 15 deadline to guarantee that any monument “erected by the Citizens of Springfield it shall be placed on the [Oak Ridge] lot,” or she would follow through and have his remains buried in Chicago. “If I had anticipated so much trouble, in having my wishes carried out,” she lectured her visitors, “I should have readily yielded to the ~~wishes~~ request of the *many* and had *his* precious remains, in the *first instance* placed in the . . . tomb prepared for Washington the Father of his Country and a fit resting place for the immortal Savior and Martyr for Freedom.”⁷³

Having few options and already concerned about the city losing the capital, the town’s leadership recognized it was more important that the casket remain in Springfield; everything else was secondary, including its exact whereabouts. Jesse W. Fell, a member of the NLMA and an old political ally of Lincoln’s, worried that the ongoing feud might give the general public an impression that there was “more to the enhanced value of town lots than to the dictates of patriotism.”⁷⁴ The evening before the deadline, the NLMA met and voted eight to seven to

⁷² Plummer, *Lincoln's Rail-Splitter*, 111.

⁷³ For Mary Lincoln’s correspondence on the gravesite, see Turner and Turner, *Mary Todd Lincoln: Her Life and Letters*, 240-245.

⁷⁴ Thomas Schwartz, “The First National Abraham Lincoln Monument Association, Part 2,” June 22, 2011, *From Out of the Top Hat: A Blog from the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library & Museum*. [<http://www.alplm.org/blog/2011/06/the-first-national-lincoln-monument-association-part-2/>]; Fell actually met with Mary Lincoln before the deadline and left convinced of her seriousness in the matter. He preferred building a monument on the Mather Lot, but placing it at Oak Ridge Cemetery was a better option than losing the remains altogether, something Fell tried to get across to his associates. “Would it not better accord with Lincoln’s tastes to be

accept Mary Lincoln's proposal.⁷⁵ Mary received confirmation from Stuart reassuring her that the group accepted her terms along with "our citizens generally, most of them cheerfully but others reluctantly, and with many regrets."⁷⁶

"Home is the Martyr"

Springfield organizers and volunteers continued their preparations in the final days before the funeral train arrived, but multiple last-minute changes coupled with a quick deadline produced numerous setbacks. Switching burial sites was a source of frustration for most people in town, however Springfield's unique position was also partly to blame. The city was the only stop on the train procession that also prepared for a funeral ceremony, and it could expect an immense number of visitors descending upon the region for the affair. Shortly after departing Washington, members of the Illinois Delegation traveling with the president's remains had been astonished by the vast number of individuals gathering to greet the train and look upon his body at each stop. These scenes so impressed them that at Albany, New York, the group met and decided one of its members should travel directly to Springfield in order to "impress upon the citizens the importance of exerting themselves to the utmost in making suitable preparations for the final ceremonies."⁷⁷

Edmond Beall recalled the long days spent finishing up. "Seats had to be built for the choir, and we all hurried off to the cemetery to erect the seats. The choir of three hundred voices

buried in a quiet, pleasant place, among his old friends," he wrote to Springfielder Shelby M. Cullom, "rather than by himself, in the heart of [a] crowded, dusty city[?]" See Craughwell, *Stealing Lincoln's Body*, 27-28.

⁷⁵ Plummer, *Lincoln's Rail-Splitter*, 112. Those voting against the terms probably did so symbolically since there was no alternative option.

⁷⁶ John T. Stuart to Mary Lincoln, July 14, 1865, Stuart-Hay Collection, ALPLM. For Mary Lincoln's correspondence on the gravesite, see Turner and Turner, *Mary Todd Lincoln: Her Life and Letters*, 240-245.

⁷⁷ Power, *Abraham Lincoln: His Great Funeral Cortege, From Washington City to Springfield, Illinois. With a History and Description of the National Lincoln Monument*, 63.

must be provided for. We had to work two days and one night to complete the work in time,” Beall remembered years afterward, “and, when through, we were a tired lot.”⁷⁸ Furthermore, little seemed to go according to plan. The most pressing issue was shifting the burial site to the Oak Ridge Cemetery, as per Mary Lincoln’s orders. Since the vault on the Mather Lot was too large to move, the City Council settled on using a temporary vault already on hand for such occasions. It was in poor shape, however, and failed to keep out rain or snow so any corpse placed inside would deteriorate quickly as a result. Laborers therefore lined the vault with “gumcloth” to prevent leakage and built a temporary brick foundation inside the structure to support the eventual coffins. This was not the welcome home Springfielders had envisioned for their neighbor’s burial, but it was their only option at the time.⁷⁹

No other task required as much attention as the burial site, but problems surfaced elsewhere. In one instance, the committee head in charge of decorating the Capitol building was out of the state. In another, the catafalque intended to hold the casket while mourners viewed the body took numerous hours to complete.⁸⁰ After its completion, Governor Richard Oglesby informed the laborers that it faced the wrong direction. Instead of rotating it as he ordered, the crew nailed down the heavy object with spikes, without Oglesby’s knowledge, making it nearly impossible to move it. Other tasks remained unfinished due to the scarcity of black crape and bunting in the region following news of Lincoln’s death two weeks prior.⁸¹ Nearly 40 percent of

⁷⁸ Beall, "Recollections of the Assassination and Funeral of Abraham Lincoln," 489; Quinn, "Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War," 88.

⁷⁹ John T. Stuart to Mary Lincoln, July 14, 1865, Stuart-Hay Collection, ALPLM; Records of the First Presbyterian Church, page 6, Box 5, Lincoln Memorial Collection, ALPLM; Dorothy Kunhardt and Philip B. Kunhardt, *Twenty Days: A Narrative in Text and Pictures of the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln and the Twenty Days and Nights that Followed--the Nation in Mourning, the Long Trip Home to Springfield* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 249.

⁸⁰ Beall, "Recollections of the Assassination and Funeral of Abraham Lincoln," 489.

⁸¹ Local business owners sought goods from across the country in the wake of news that Springfield would be Lincoln’s final resting place, such as this request to a store in New York City: “Send to Springfield Illinois by

the \$20,000 provided by the city went to “cambrics and drapery,” not including labor costs.⁸² In one instance, though, the committee charged with decorating the Capitol dome arranged a pattern combining white and black draping, leading to one Springfielder’s opinion that the trim around the building “was not heavy looking or handsome at all.”⁸³ Volunteers also helped decorate Abraham Lincoln’s former home. The house had occasionally drawn visitors during the war years, but funeral organizers correctly predicted the address would be a major attraction during the ceremony.⁸⁴

The railroad car carrying Lincoln’s remains left Chicago the evening of May 2, traveling southward through the night. The train slowed, sometimes briefly stopping, when it passed through smaller communities before its expected termination the next morning at 8:00. The Funeral Train covered more than 1,600 miles over its fourteen-day journey and passed untold thousands of onlookers. They held signs expressing grief or phrases Lincoln uttered, especially the popular one from his Second Inaugural, “With Malice toward none; with charity for all.” Signs with the word “Home” increased as the train inched closer to the capital city. “COME HOME,” “BEAR HIM HOME TENDERLY,” and “HOME IS THE MARTYR,” greeted the train through central Illinois.⁸⁵ Organizers originally wanted the train to pull into the Great

United States Express 20 pieces black glazed cambric, 20 pieces of $\frac{3}{4}$ bleached cotton – cheap – 10 pieces of French Crape, all suitable for Draping the City on the arrival of the Presidents remains. Send forward in great haste.” C. M. Smith to Messrs. George Bliss & Co., New York City, April 19, 1865, John B. S. Todd Collection, ALPLM.

⁸² Henrietta E. Bromwell to Dr. Carman, March 14, 1912, Henrietta Bromwell Collection, ALPLM; Kunhardt and Kunhardt, *Twenty Days*, 253-254. Approximately 15 percent of the city’s funds went to music for the funeral. Other expenses went toward lumber, printing, sand, rent of Capitol Hall, and the cost of transferring Willie Lincoln’s casket from Washington to Springfield. See the City Comptroller’s Report, *City Finances: Statement of the Finances of the City of Springfield, for the Year Ending Feb. 28, 1866. As Exhibited in the Annual Reports of Officers* (Springfield: Journal Company Steam Press Print, 1866), 22-23.

⁸³ Corneau, "A Girl in the Sixties," 444.

⁸⁴ Quinn, "Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War," 87; Beall, "Recollections of the Assassination and Funeral of Abraham Lincoln."; Craughwell, *Stealing Lincoln's Body*, 19.

⁸⁵ Kunhardt and Kunhardt, *Twenty Days*, 245.

Western Depot, where the president-elect gave his last farewell to the community in 1861. They had to change plans the day before his arrival since the train was already behind schedule and would have to travel out of the way to accommodate such a feat. Therefore, the Chicago and Alton Depot would be the train's last stop.⁸⁶

The black-draped cars pulled into the station at 9:00, only one hour behind schedule. Yet the delay allowed the crowd to expand to roughly 40,000 spectators who were packed tightly together on both sides of the track or perched atop roofs. But none of that appeared to matter. One reporter described the scene he witnessed once people first glimpsed the casket: "oppressive silence gave way to a burst of grief, and a flood of tears. Men and women who had been smothering their emotions could now no longer control themselves, and their tears literally fell like 'April rain.'"⁸⁷ This pattern continued as the hearse carrying the president's remains passed through Springfield's neighborhoods on its route to the Capitol. Upon reaching the State House, Lincoln's body was transferred to the House of Representatives' Hall where it laid open for 24 hours to anyone who wished to view their former neighbor's remains one last time. The lines of observers – "six abreast" per organizers' instructions – remained steady throughout the day and night, and an estimated 75,000 bodies looked upon Lincoln's body.⁸⁸

Trainloads of visitors continued to pour into Springfield, and some estimates put the number at 150,000 in town that day.⁸⁹ Those arriving found a community full of sorrow, one

⁸⁶ Ralph G. Newman, "In This Sad World of Ours, Sorrow Comes to All': A Timetable for the Lincoln Funeral Train," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 58, no. 1 (Spring 1965): 17-18; James T. Hickey, "Springfield, May, 1865," *ibid.*: 32-33.

⁸⁷ Quinn, "Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War," 89.

⁸⁸ "PROGRAMME OF RECEPTION," Lincoln Collection, ALPLM; Newman, "In This Sad World of Ours, Sorrow Comes to All'," 18-19; William Turner Coggeshall, *Lincoln Memorial. The Journeys of Abraham Lincoln: From Springfield to Washington, 1861, as President elect; and from Washington to Springfield, 1865* (Michigan Historical Reprint Series), 155; Angle, "Here I Have Lived", 292.

⁸⁹ Hickey, "Springfield, May, 1865," 33.

observer acknowledging that Springfield “wears a mournful appearance since President Lincoln was shot.” This visitor was also impressed with the time and energy put into the occasion, noting that “All of the stores around the square and the principle streets are draped in mourning, and the State House was fixed up in Splendid stile, it being draped in mourning clear to the top of the dome.”⁹⁰ After viewing Lincoln’s casket visitors then toured Springfield looking for relics or markers associated with the martyred president, including his former home. They were encouraged to take flowers and leaves from the home as reminders of the occasion, but some wanted more by chipping off parts of the surrounding wooden fence while one man was caught walking off with a brick from the Lincoln abode.⁹¹

After the State House and the Lincoln Home, guests made their way to the building where the “Lincoln & Herndon” sign still hung. Herndon fondly relayed the story of the sign to interested passersby, narrating Lincoln’s last conversation with his partner before leaving for the White House. “Give our clients to understand that the election of a President makes no change in the firm of Lincoln and Herndon,” Lincoln said, for “if I live I’m coming back some time, and then we’ll go right on practising law as if nothing had ever happened.”⁹² Despite the former law partner’s tales promoting his relationship with the sixteenth president, Herndon had a minimal role in the funeral ceremonies. Unlike Lincoln’s first two partners, John T. Stuart and Stephen T. Logan, Herndon was not a pallbearer due to a disagreement between him and his fellow lawyers in the city.⁹³ Herndon once insisted that he knew more about his former law partner than anyone

⁹⁰ Edbridge Atwood to Sister, May 7, 1865, Atwood Family Papers, ALPLM.

⁹¹ Henrietta E. Bromwell to Dr. Carman, March 14, 1912, Henrietta Bromwell Collection, ALPLM; W. W. Sweet, “Bishop Matthew Simpson and the Funeral of Abraham Lincoln,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* (1908-1984) 7, no. 1 (1914): 66.

⁹² Donald, *Lincoln*, 272.

⁹³ Kunhardt and Kunhardt, *Twenty Days*, 272-273.

else, “better than Lincoln himself,” but that message conflicted with the minor role he played in Springfield’s attempt to honor the president’s legacy.⁹⁴

The Great Emancipator?

The constant “tramp, tramp of busy feet” in the streets and arrival of trains throughout the night prevented anyone from getting any rest, including those fortunate enough to secure a place to sleep.⁹⁵ The sky opened clear as the city awoke on May 4, the day of the funeral, an early indication of the unseasonably warm day ahead.⁹⁶ The president’s coffin was closed twenty-four hours after its placement in the House of Representative’s Hall, after tens of thousands mourners had passed by it.⁹⁷ The horse-drawn hearse carrying his casket began its final journey through Springfield before noon as part of a lengthy procession made up of eight divisions, each one composed of hundreds, sometimes thousands, of participants. Military personnel made up the first two divisions, including Springfield’s John A. McClelland who served as Grand Marshal. The president’s hearse trailed the third division, followed by a riderless “Old Bob,” the horse Lincoln rode during his travels across the Eighth District legal circuit.⁹⁸ Family of the deceased followed, including Robert Lincoln, the only immediate member to attend. Mary Lincoln’s

⁹⁴ Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon*, 165-166; Henry B. Rankin, *Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1916), 148.

⁹⁵ Power, *Abraham Lincoln: His Great Funeral Cortege, From Washington City to Springfield, Illinois. With a History and Description of the National Lincoln Monument*, 115; Beall, "Recollections of the Assassination and Funeral of Abraham Lincoln," 492.

⁹⁶ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 5, 1865

⁹⁷ Angle, "Here I Have Lived", 292.

⁹⁸ Newman, "'In This Sad World of Ours, Sorrow Comes to All'," 19.

cousin Elizabeth Grimsley accompanied Robert in the carriage, having refused the First Lady's request to console her in Washington.⁹⁹

The fourth division consisted of national statesmen and foreign dignitaries, and the fifth was made up of Springfield officials led by former mayor George L. Huntington. William H. Herndon was marshal of the sixth division that included other prominent individuals in town currently unaffiliated with political office. Members of various local fraternities, highlighted by the Free Masons and Odd Fellows, walked with firemen in the seventh division. The last and largest division reserved a spot for "Citizens at large." Anyone interested in marching with the procession, Springfield resident or not, could jump in line.¹⁰⁰

Taking up the rear position, as they had the previous day during the coffin's procession from the train depot to the State House, were "Colored Persons." With soldiers marching in front and blacks in the back, Springfield organizers emphasized Lincoln's image as the "Savior of the Union" over the "Great Emancipator."¹⁰¹ In fact, absent from the funeral preparations the previous three weeks was any effort to highlight Lincoln's hand in ending slavery, at least among Springfield's white residents. This was still a community with deep political divisions, Lincoln's death notwithstanding, and organizers spent their energies revering Lincoln's role preserving the nation in order to allow all an opportunity to participate in the ceremonies.

At least two men faced a difficult decision when it came time to take their place in the procession. Henry Brown, a local black minister in town who had provided the Lincoln family with handiwork to supplement his meager pastoral salary, offered to lead "Old Bob" during the procession. But his decision was the exception. Arguably the closest relationship any of

⁹⁹ J. B. S. Todd to J. T. Stuart, April 15, 1865, John B. S. Todd Collection, ALPLM.

¹⁰⁰ "Obsequies of President Lincoln," Lincoln Collection, ALPLM.

¹⁰¹ "Obsequies of President Lincoln," Lincoln Collection, ALPLM.

Springfield's black residents had with Lincoln was William de Fleurville, affectionately known in town as "Billy the Barber." Originally from Haiti, Fleurville met Lincoln when they lived in New Salem. Lincoln helped Fleurville round up some customers to promote his barber business, and soon left for Springfield to expand his clientele. Fleurville became a leading spokesman for Springfield's African-American community, and he wrote at least two letters to Lincoln during the war years. Funeral organizers invited the popular barber to march near the front of the procession with family and close friends of the deceased, and Fleurville struggled over his decision to accept the invitation or walk in the rear with members of his race. Benjamin Quarles has noted that Springfield blacks were eager for the opportunity to march and honor the individual they considered "the benefactor of our race" at a mass meeting in the Baptist Church just days after learning of the assassination. As such, Fleurville decided against marching with those near the front and instead walked in the back alongside those whom he considered the crowd's – and the country's – "truest mourners."¹⁰²

**“And Freedom's son of every race
Shall weep and worship here.”**

The formation entered the cemetery and twisted through the grounds until reaching the vault that would hold Lincoln's body. Those in the rear of the roughly two-mile procession had barely moved once the remains made it to Oak Ridge, including the nearly ten thousand who decided to march in the division open to all. After placing the coffin on a large marble slab atop a

¹⁰² Benjamin Quarles, *Lincoln and the Negro* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1991), 26-28, 243-244.

brick foundation inside the tomb, speakers and members of the clergy addressed the somber yet sweltering crowd.¹⁰³

While Springfield organizers did all they could to direct the narrative of Lincoln as “Savior of the Union,” the funeral ceremony was a different matter. Lincoln’s transfer from the State House signaled Springfield’s handover to federal planners, and it also meant all efforts to stress his “Savior” narrative were no longer under the city’s control. This was most evident during the funeral ceremony at Oak Ridge, where those providing eulogies and orations highlighted Lincoln’s role in both combatting the rebellion *and* slavery. Albert Hale, reverend of the Second Presbyterian Church, opened with a lengthy invocation and urged everyone to appreciate the good that came from Lincoln’s presence in the land. The country should be grateful “that Thou didst give him to this people ... and that through him Thou hast led them through storm and strife to the present hopeful condition of our public affairs.” Hale also requested God’s blessing for “the people of the city and of the state in which he has grown up, whose affection he holds to-day in his death, stronger than in the most powerful moment of his life.” In addition to restoring the Union and serving as an ideal example for future statesmen, the abolitionist preacher felt moved to “thank Thee for that other example which he acted in a steady adherence to truth, a love of freedom and opposition to wrong and injustice, and slavery.”¹⁰⁴ Hale took advantage of the platform to underscore Lincoln’s role in destroying slavery, a theme few of his fellow townsmen had emphasized up to this point but one that successive eulogizers referenced through the observance.

¹⁰³ Quinn, "Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War," 91-92; Beall, "Recollections of the Assassination and Funeral of Abraham Lincoln," 490-492.

¹⁰⁴ Wayne C. Temple, *Abraham Lincoln: From Skeptic to Prophet* (Mahomet, IL: Mayhaven Publishing, 1995), 341-342.

After the choir from Washington sang “Farewell Father, Friend and Guardian,” and Reverend Noyes W. Miner of the First Baptist Church read selections from the New Testament, A. C. Hubbard, minister of the Second Baptist Church, followed by reciting Lincoln’s now-famous Second Inaugural Address.¹⁰⁵ In the aftermath of the assassination, Northern ministers incorporated the speech into their eulogies based on its religious tone and message.¹⁰⁶ Ronald C. White has stressed this point by noting Lincoln’s ability to connect faith with the politics of the era. “Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God,” Lincoln acknowledged. The president also mentioned “God” fourteen times, quoted from scripture four times, and appealed to prayer three times, a far cry from the largely secular – and much longer – message given in his First Inaugural Address.¹⁰⁷ Lincoln’s Second Inaugural was also a favorite for ministers who sympathized with the abolitionist cause. “All knew that this interest [slavery] was somehow the cause of the war,” he spoke back in March at his swearing-in.

“If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him?”

“Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray,” Lincoln concluded his speech,

“that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said ‘the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.’”

¹⁰⁵ Hubbard was the last member of the Springfield clergy to address the gathering. First Presbyterian Church, where the Lincolns attended and Mary was a member, was between pastors and played virtually no role in the ceremonies. The city’s other ministers, a majority of whom had opposed Lincoln’s presidency and reelection, were also absent from the public ceremonies.

¹⁰⁶ Temple, *Abraham Lincoln: From Skeptic to Prophet*, 343.

¹⁰⁷ White, *A. Lincoln: A Biography*, 663.

With this speech Lincoln successfully merged political emancipation with a style of rhetoric typically reserved for the church pulpit, and Northern abolitionist ministers rarely hesitated from reciting it to their congregations.¹⁰⁸

Bishop Matthew Simpson of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia offered the final oration. Simpson was one of the most prominent and popular Methodist preachers in the country before the war and on behalf of the Union cause throughout the conflict. He openly supported Lincoln in the 1864 presidential campaign and provided the opening prayer at Lincoln's funeral in Washington.¹⁰⁹ Simpson began his hour-long oration with a tribute to the crowd and the role the Springfield community played in shaping Lincoln's life. "His home was in the growing West, the heart of the Republic," the preacher acknowledged, "and, invigorated by the wind which swept over its prairies, he learned lessons of self-reliance which sustained him in seasons of adversity." Distinctly aware of the now-famous Springfield farewell address from 1861, Simpson paraphrased parts of that speech, inserting a few changes, but sticking close to the main text:

"A little more than four years ago he left his plain and quiet home in yonder city, receiving the departing words of the concourse of friends who, in the midst of the dropping of the gentle shower, gathered around him. He spoke of the pain of parting from the place where he had lived for a quarter of a century, where his children had been born, and his home had been rendered pleasant by friendly associations, and, as he left, he made an earnest request, in the hearing of some who are present at this hour, that, as he was about to enter upon responsibilities which he believed to be greater than any which had fallen upon any man since the days of Washington, the people would offer up prayers that God would aid and sustain him in the work which they had given him to do. His company left your quiet city, but, as it went, snares were in waiting for the Chief Magistrate."

¹⁰⁸ Excerpts found in *ibid*, 662-663.

¹⁰⁹ David B. Chesebrough, *"No Sorrow like Our Sorrow": Northern Protestant Ministers and the Assassination of Lincoln* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1994), 126. It seems likely that the preacher's close relationship with Secretary of War Stanton played a role in Simpson's selection as the primary eulogist for the funeral in Springfield. Jr. Mark E. Neely, *The Abraham Lincoln Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1982), 277-278; Temple, *Abraham Lincoln: From Skeptic to Prophet*, 344.

“How different the occasion,” Simpson continued, “which witnessed his departure from that which witnessed his return.” With added hyperbole, Simpson expressed that “Doubtless you expected to take him by the hand, and to feel the warm grasp which you had felt in other days, and to see the tall form walking among you which you had delighted to honor in years past.” This death was different than any other before, Simpson went on, because “never was there, in the history of many, such mourning” as had been expressed throughout the North and along the path of the Funeral Train.¹¹⁰

It was the war that shaped Lincoln’s legacy, and Northern victory elevated his image to that of a martyr. For this reason Simpson implored listeners to understand that his placement at the top of the Union was no fluke. “Mr. Lincoln was no ordinary man,” the preacher claimed, and not for “the hand of God, he was especially singled out to guide our Government in these troublesome times.” But it was more than the victories on the battlefield that demanded admiration. In addition to preserving the Union, arguably the most noteworthy goal was “that of giving freedom to a race,” Simpson claimed, akin to Moses of the New Testament. “Yet we may assert that Abraham Lincoln, by his proclamation, liberated more enslaved people than ever Moses set free, and those not of his kindred or his race.” Having accomplished this task, “his work was done, and he sealed his glory by becoming the nation’s great martyr for liberty.” God had now called him to heaven.¹¹¹

It was time for the nation to move forward, and Simpson offered Lincoln’s oft-quoted phrase “with malice towards none” as a guide for his fellow countrymen. However, historian George C. Rable has demonstrated that this expression had a wide, and often contradictory,

¹¹⁰ "Oration at Lincoln's Burial at Springfield, Illinois, Bishop Matthew Simpson, May 4, 1865," found in Chesebrough, *No Sorrow like Our Sorrow*, 127, 131.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 130, 133-134, 135.

interpretation. After eulogizing Lincoln's life and achievements in the wake of the assassination, ministers throughout the North advocated strict punishment for leaders of the rebellion.¹¹² After quoting Lincoln's phrase and encouraging his audience to remain "free from all feelings of personal vengeance," Simpson, in his next breath, still believed that the "sword must not be borne in vain." He demanded that the South's political leadership "be brought to speedy and to certain punishment"; that its military leadership "be doomed to a traitor's death"; that, as a whole, "there shall be no safety for rebel leaders." Only the "deluded masses" who had been deceived by their government should be forgiven.¹¹³ Lincoln's old neighbor and friend Francis Springer, serving as a military chaplain in the Union army, presented similar themes in his eulogy to soldiers and civilians in Arkansas. Springer described Lincoln as "a citizen of probity, prudence and honor," and that his friend's death was the consequence of "the character and responsibility of the whole rebel fraternity." For anyone who expressed the smallest inkling of support toward the Confederacy, "and do not with-draw now, you make yourself a willing partner with the murderers."¹¹⁴ As Rable points out, these abolitionist ministers used their pulpit to lecture on Lincoln's greatness and slavery's appropriate extinction as a fitting end to the war's conclusion. But they had misconstrued Lincoln's final message to the nation in his Second Inaugural, even when they referenced the speech in their eulogies: "malice toward none, with charity for all."

No doubt this tactic frustrated many. Philemon Stout attended the service and witnessed "the largest procession & the most pomp & display I ever saw." That said, the Democratic supporter and farmer just outside of town had this to say of the oration: "Heard a discourse by

¹¹² Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples*, 375, 385.

¹¹³ Chesebrough, "No Sorrow like Our Sorrow", 137.

¹¹⁴ Springer's eulogy can be found in Furry, *The Preacher's Tale*, 137-144.

bishop Simpson very eloquent but ultra abolition.”¹¹⁵ Edward L. Merritt, the Democratic editor of the *Register*, described Simpson’s sermon as “a lengthy and strong funeral oration, fierce in its revengeful and invective denunciation of the southern rebellion leaders. Probably it was more so than would have met the approval of the dead, generous President,” Merritt accurately noted, “but this the times seemed to excuse.”¹¹⁶

After a dirge and requiem from the choir, Reverend Phineas Gurley, the president’s pastor from the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, offered a final benediction. The choir then closed the service with a hymn composed by Gurley. The lyrics mirrored the words heard that day: “Rest, noble Martyr!” “Who, like thee, fell in Freedom’s cause, The nation’s life to save.” No part better summed up the theme that afternoon, however, than the last two verses:

Thy name shall live while time endures,
And men shall say of thee,
“He saved his country from its foes,
And bade the slave be free.”

This consecrated spot shall be
To Freedom ever dear
And Freedom’s son of every race
Shall weep and worship here.¹¹⁷

The metal doors of the vault were shut and locked. Before returning to Washington to tend to his mother, Robert Lincoln entrusted John T. Stuart with the key to the vault, instigating the ongoing conflict over the proposed Lincoln monument later that summer.¹¹⁸ The thousands in

¹¹⁵ Diary of Philemon Stout, May 4, 1865, Philemon Stout Collection, ALPLM.

¹¹⁶ Merritt, "Recollections of the Part Springfield Bore in the Obsequies of Abraham Lincoln," 182.

¹¹⁷ “Funeral Hymn, By the Deceased President’s Pastor, the Rev. P. D. Gurley, D. D. (New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, Washington,), TO BE SUNG AT THE GRAVE IN SPRINGFIELD,” found in Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 21.

¹¹⁸ Craughwell, *Stealing Lincoln's Body*, 26-27.

attendance that day walked quietly down the hill and exited the cemetery. They would not soon forget the events they had witnessed. Words failed to capture the event, the Athens farmer John Edward Young wrote in his journal. “To understand and appreciate the magnificent and solemn pageant witnessed today one must have beheld it. It was worth all the time—expense and trouble that it cost to witness it.”¹¹⁹ Over one million faces had viewed his remains, but the last ones to do so were those who had recognized him before he became a national figure. After the nation’s most trying ordeal in Civil War, Abraham Lincoln had finally returned to Springfield. Home was the Martyr.

¹¹⁹ "An Illinois Farmer during the Civil War," 131.

CONCLUSION

On a calm and sunny May 1865 morning, three weeks after the most notorious assassination in American history, Abraham Lincoln's body returned home. A somber crowd of roughly 40,000 gathered at the Chicago and Alton Railroad Depot to welcome his remains back to Springfield – four times the size of the city's 1860 population, and 400 times the number who bade him and his family goodbye in 1861. Springfield was where Abraham Lincoln owned his only home and raised a family, a place, he professed to the crowd before departing in 1861, "I owe all that I have." Since then, the city of Springfield has connected its history with the legacy of America's Sixteenth President. Abraham Lincoln is one of the most iconic figures in American history, but his legacy – and image – in Springfield is without parallel.

Yet when he left his Springfield home in 1861 he did so a divided figure, and his reputation grew increasingly polarizing over the course of his presidency. Though he won the city's popular vote in the reelection of 1864 (barely), he remained controversial in the final months of his life. Over four years of war residents differed over how best to deal with the slaveholding states that had seceded, they argued over the appropriate military approach the Union Army should pursue against the rebellion, and they fought bitterly over the policy of emancipation that was eventually tied to the conflict's goal. The city was a political battleground where the fate of Illinois's continued participation in the war was contested with regularity. As this dissertation demonstrates, Lincoln's relationship with the place he called home before his assassination is significantly more complex than the one portrayed in Springfield today, in many ways mirroring the Northern political discord experienced during the Civil War.

That said, the story of Springfield during the Civil War was one of both continuity *and* change. In the span of four weeks in the spring of 1865, beginning with the surrender of General

Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia on April 9 and ending with his burial on May 4, Lincoln had become the nation's martyr. His enduring image as the "Savior of the Union" depicted throughout the city concealed all prior resentment toward him. His passing ultimately united the politically divided Springfield community, and the city continues to foster that legacy of worship toward the former neighbor-in-chief. Furthermore, it was this sudden shift in the spring of 1865 that preserved Springfield's position as the state capital, a city struggling to keep up with the population growth and economic development occurring in other parts of Illinois. Lincoln's tomb today lies in Springfield even though leaders at the time made grave concessions in order to achieve that goal. But the townspeople's actions during that four-week stretch in 1865 laid the foundation for successive generations to take up the task of identifying and creating a single narrative over their former neighbor's legacy.

Lincoln's death also reshaped the city's political and racial landscape in the decades following the Civil War. Postwar elections revealed a transition away from the partisan back-and-forth that was a staple of the war years to a period of Republican control. This was not uncommon for cities and towns across the North that similarly experienced extreme partisanship during the Civil War. The difference here was that the deep political divide over the four years of war became a distant memory in the effort to memorialize the "Savior of the Union." It seems that the two presidential elections Lincoln scarcely won (and the controversial figure he had become during the war) within the city limits were forgotten. Finally, the end of the war brought an influx of former slaves north, a good number of whom settled in Springfield. The city's black population jumped after Appomattox as it likewise did across the state. The 1860 census recorded 203 blacks residing in Springfield, while in 1870 the number rose to 808, nearly five percent of the town's inhabitants. This was the highest percentage in its recorded history after

decades of a relatively small presence in the Illinois capital.¹ But as with the 1865 funeral there was disagreement among community members over how best to remember the Lincoln of Springfield lore. The same tug over Lincoln as “Savior of the Union” and “The Great Emancipator” continued well after he was laid to rest, and anti-black attitudes in town culminated in the 1908 Springfield Race Riot. Anti-black rioting was nothing new in the early twentieth century, but because this was Abraham Lincoln’s home – as well as one year before the centennial of his birth – this prompted the organization of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Despite burial plans not shaping up as local leaders had hoped in 1865, possession of Lincoln’s remains still aided the city as the state legislature approved Springfield’s bid to remain the Illinois capital in 1867 over rival communities Peoria, Decatur, and Jacksonville.² Springfield did not suffer the fate of Illinois’s two previous state capitals, Kaskaskia and Vandalia. One reason was because Springfield stressed a prime location for the building in its application: the Mather Lot, the town leaders’ preferred downtown site for Lincoln’s tomb, which the city owned yet had no new plans for the space. Construction on the new Capitol began in 1868, it opened to the General Assembly in 1876 despite being unfinished, and it continues to serve as the seat of Illinois government. Its predecessor, the state’s fourth Capitol building – the one Lincoln was intimately familiar with – is now a favorite stop for tourists to the area.

According to the Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau, nearly one million visitors descend upon the Illinois capital annually and take in Lincoln’s tomb and other landmarks

¹ McLain, "A Study of the Population of Illinois from 1860-1870," 61-65.

² Cole, *The Era of the Civil War*, 351.

commemorating the martyred executive.³ In 2013, tourism accounted for over 3,000 jobs in the county and 7.53 million dollars in local tax revenue.⁴ But tourism did not take off in Springfield until the early twentieth century, ahead of the centennial of Lincoln's birth in 1909 and the commemoration of the Civil War's fiftieth anniversary. Visitors before that had trouble navigating their way around town with few markers carrying information on Lincoln's life. As a result, the city's leadership began identifying landmarks associated with the Sixteenth President that continues to this day.

³Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau, January 2005 (<http://www.visit-springfieldillinois.com/Documents/SpringfieldFactsheet.pdf>)

⁴“Springfield, Illinois Tourism's New Brand is 'Always Legendary',” October 2, 2014 (<http://www.exhibitoronline.com/news/article.asp?ID=13981>)

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