

Saloon License  
Folder 2

DRAWER 3

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Fruit - New Salem



# Abraham Lincoln before 1860

## New Salem Saloon License

Folder 2

Excerpts from newspapers and other  
sources

From the files of the  
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection



## LINCOLN'S LIQUOR LICENSE

To the Editor of the Public Ledger: <sup>Phila.</sup> 2-29-

Sir—Concerning the position of Abraham Lincoln upon prohibition, I have in my possession a document that may be of interest. It purports to be a liquor license issued to Abraham Lincoln on Wednesday, March 6, 1833, and reads:

Order: That William F. Berry, in the name of Berry & Lincoln, have a license to keep a tavern in New Salem to continue twelve months from this date and that they pay One Dollar in addition to Six Dollars heretofore paid as sub-treasury receipt and that they be allowed the following rates:

French brandy, per pint, 25 cents;  
Peach brandy, per pint, 18½ cents; Apple brandy, per pint, 12 cents; Holland gin, per pint, 18 cents; Wine, per pint, 25 cents; Rum, per pint, 18½ cents; Whiskey, per pint, 12½ cents.

Breakfast, dinner and supper, 25 cents;  
Lodging for night, 12½ cents; Horse, for night, 25 cents; single feed, 12½ cents;  
Breakfast, dinner or supper, for stage passenger, 37½ cents.

My information about Mr. Lincoln may be wrong, but I do advise those who are putting down Abraham Lincoln as a prohibitionist to take time and find out the facts.

C. L. MASON.

Cassville, N. J., February 13, 1929.

There is general agreement that Mr. Lincoln at one time was a storekeeper and, as was customary in that day, the store sold spirits.—The Editor.

## LINCOLN NOT A BARTENDER

To the Editor of The Leader: <sup>Phila.</sup> 2-29-

In the issue of this paper dated Sept 15 is a report headed, "Liquor Dealers Organize." According to this report, evidently a certain person has "bought golden opinions." It says that Mr. Frank P. Quinn was unanimously re-elected as president of the Liquor Dealers' Association of Connecticut; and in addition to this, he received a handsome gold watch, a purse containing \$250 in gold and a gavel bearing the inscription, "Made from the bar in Abe Lincoln's saloon." "Which things the angels desire to look into;" much more, they that are a little lower than the angels.

As the implication has gone forth that Lincoln was once a bartender, let us investigate this matter. Mr. James Mergan, in his Life of Lincoln, referring to the store in which the embryo lawyer had a half interest, says that "all country stores in those times sold liquor, though in this one THERE WAS NO BAR!"

With respect to Lincoln's career as a storekeeper the salient points are these: Lincoln was a sort of "silent partner" in a concern handling groceries and grog, the affairs being ostensibly conducted by William F. Berry, who himself was the firm's best (?) patron, inasmuch as he zealously obeyed the apostolic injunction to "try the spirits." In other words, while Lincoln earnestly addressed himself to Blackstone and Shakespeare, this "gooseberry," with equal assiduity, applied himself to barrel and spigot. The natural consequence, therefore, was that within a short time—to use an expressive phrase in the vernacular of that period—the business "winked out," leaving Lincoln saddled with debts, which ultimately he

paid in full, though he was under no legal obligation to settle with his creditors.

The Rev. J. T. Hobson, in his book, "Footprints of Abraham Lincoln," says: "Mr. Douglas, in his debates with Lincoln, twitted him as having been a 'grocery keeper' that sold whisky. In his reply Lincoln said jocosely that Mr. Douglas had been one of his best customers, and that he himself had left his side of the counter, while Douglas stuck to his own side as tenaciously as ever. When Lincoln left off joking, however, he declared that HE NEVER HAD SOLD WHISKY IN HIS LIFE!"

In passing, it may be permissible to cite Lincoln's testimony as to his personal attitude toward liquor drinking. Upon a certain occasion, while Lincoln was a member of Congress, when urged by a colleague to take a glass of liquor, he said, "I promised my precious mother only a few days before she died that I never would use anything intoxicating as a beverage, and I consider that promise as binding today as it was on the day I made it."

In "Reminiscences of Lincoln," edited by Allen Thorndike Rice, Leonard Swett, the attorney, who for eleven years was associated with Lincoln in the Eighth Judicial district of Illinois, says, referring to the subject of his sketch, "He told me, not more than a year before he was elected President, that he never had tasted liquor in his life. 'What!' I exclaimed, 'do you mean to say that you never even TASTED it?' 'Yes,' was the answer. 'I never even tasted it!'"

Lincoln, both by voice and pen, made herculean efforts to corral "the legalized outlaw," and his first contribution to the press was a plea for the temperance cause. In the years 1854-55 Mr. Lincoln conjointly with Major James B. Merwin canvassed Illinois in the interest of state prohibition, using nearly the same language, and in many instances the same illustrations, that he used later in his arguments against slavery.

Shortly before he himself passed over the great divide, the Hon. Elihu B. Washburne wrote that "when the whole truth is disclosed of Mr. Lincoln's life during the years of 1854-55, it will throw a flood of new light on the character of Mr. Lincoln, and will add new luster to his greatness and his patriotism."

Only eight hours before the assassin "fired the shot heard round the world" our martyr-chief made this memorable pronouncement. "After reconstruction the next great question will be THE OVERTHROW OF THE LIQUOR TRAFFIC!"

If the great War President had once been a bartender, would he have made it possible for others to judge him out of his own mouth by his making the following declaration? "We must not be satisfied until the public sentiment of this state and the individual conscience shall be instructed to look upon the saloonkeeper and the liquor seller with all the license that each can give him, as simply and only a privileged malefactor — A CRIMINAL!"

Metinks there comes a voice from the excellent glory: "The saloon and the liquor traffic have defenders—BUT NO DEFENSE!"



# Question of Lincoln's Sale of Liquor Bobs Up Again On Eve of Repeal Vote; Never Determined, Paul M. Angle Declares

*Ill. State Register*

The controversial question as to whether Abraham Lincoln sold liquor under a license issued here 100 years ago to the firm of Berry and Lincoln was revived Saturday, on the eve of the Illinois vote on prohibition repeal.

brandy, 12; Holland gin, 18%; domestic, 12; wine, 25; rum, 18%; whiskey, 12½.

County commissioners were Josiah B. Smith, Thomas Moffett and Reuben Harrison.

County Clerk Ray D. Stout received a letter from J. H. Jones of Columbia Station, O., asking if it is true that such a license was granted.

A search of old records showed that a license was issued March 6, 1833. It was a license to keep a tavern at New Salem and listed rates for various liquors as well as for lodging and meals.

Asked about the historical significance of the license, Paul M. Angle, state historical librarian, said it never had been determined historically whether Lincoln operated under the license. The partnership was dissolved shortly after the license was granted, Angle said.

Minutes of the county commissioners for that day included the following:

"Ordered that William F. Berry in the name of Berry and Lincoln have licensè to keep a tavern in New Salem to continue 12 months from this date and that they pay one dollar in addition to six dollars heretofore paid as per treasurer's receipt, and that they be allowed the following rates (viz):"

Half-pint rates for liquors were listed as follows: French brandy, 25 cents; peach brandy, 18%; apple





### LINCOLN'S LIQUOR LICENSE

Can you tell me if a liquor license was issued to Abraham Lincoln in Illinois? If so, is it still in existence and where is it kept? Where can I obtain more information on it? D.

A license to sell liquor in small quantities to be consumed on the premises was issued to the firm of Berry & Lincoln, March 6, 1833. This was copied into the Record Book of the County Commissioners Court, the original volume of which is in the Illinois State Historical Library in Springfield. The bond for \$300, with the names of Wm. F. Berry, Abraham Lincoln and Bowling Green, is in the library's manuscript file. Doubt has been cast on the authenticity of the signatures of Lincoln and Green, but Berry's signature closely resembles that appearing on other documents. Harry E. Pratt, executive secretary of The Abraham Lincoln Association, explains that it was common for persons distant from Springfield to send an authorization for one person to sign for several others.

Consult "Lincoln and Liquor" by W. H. Townsend and Bulletins 27, 28 of the Abraham Lincoln Association. *Check Signer 3-12-41*



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# LINCOLN LORE

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FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

March 30, 1953

## THE TAVERN LICENSE BROADSIDE

Seldom a week passes that the Foundation's attention is not called to either a news item or a separately printed document featuring a tavern license taken out in the name of Berry and Lincoln at New Salem. There has been a large number of posters of various sizes presenting this information which have become known to Lincoln students as The Tavern License Broadside.

This reproduction of two early documents associated with Lincoln's New Salem days which may be found in many forms and sizes usually is captioned "Abraham Lincoln's Saloon License" and it has been given nationwide circulation. A picture of Lincoln is often associated with a facsimile of the tavern license taken out by William F. Berry, and another facsimile of a "good behavior" bond purported to be signed by Abraham Lincoln, William F. Berry and Bowling Green. Without careful scrutiny, the observer would conclude that here is positive proof that Abraham Lincoln at one time ran a grocery or "grocery" as saloons were then called, and it is apparent from notations on the broadsides and the featuring of the alleged Lincoln signature that the purpose of the broadsides is to convey this idea.

*The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* should be accepted as a final authority on the genuineness of all original documents which have come to the attention of its editors. Roy P. Basler and his assistant, Mrs. Harry Pratt, who are experts in the field of Lincoln's handwriting, in passing on the authenticity of writings submitted also have had the professional advice of three other Lincoln authorities, Paul M. Angle, the late J. G. Randall, and Benjamin P. Thomas.

Appendix two in the *Collected Works* presents a list of documents where some one other than Lincoln signed his name. The first manuscript noted where this occurs is on the peace bond mentioned above which follows in part:

"Know all men by these presents: We William F. Berry, Abraham Lincoln and John Bowling Green, are held and firmly bound into the County Commissioners of Sangamon County in the full sum of \$300. . . . Now if the same Berry and Lincoln shall be of good behavior and observe all the laws of this state relative to tavern keeping, then this obligation to be void or otherwise remain in full force.

"Abraham Lincoln (seal)  
"William Berry (seal)  
"Bowling Green (seal)"

The comment of the editors of the *Collected Works* who had before them this original bond now in the archives of the Illinois State Historical Society is as follows:

"1833, Mar. 6. William S. Berry signs Lincoln's name to a bond for license to sell liquor at Berry-Lincoln store at New Salem."

Here these authorities substantiate what leading Lincoln students have claimed for years that the signature in question is not that of Abraham Lincoln. William Townsend in his book *Lincoln and Liquor* published as early as 1934 states: "Apparently Berry subscribed his partners' name to the document, since an examination of the original shows that it is not in Lincoln's handwriting."

The other manuscript usually displayed, although not given so much prominence, is the license which was

issued on the strength of the bond. It however, was taken out by William Berry and apparently issued to him personally to do business in the name of Berry and Lincoln. An excerpt from the license follows:

"Springfield, Wednesday, March 8, 1833

"Ordered that William F. Berry in the name of 'Berry and Lincoln' have license to keep a tavern in New Salem to continue 12 months from this date. . . ."

While the documents seem to designate the firm name of the tavern operators as Berry and Lincoln, it is evident that Lincoln was not present when the bond was signed or it would have contained his actual signature. The same conclusion might be drawn with respect to the granting of the license to Berry individually instead of to the partners Berry and Lincoln.

During the first debate with Lincoln at Ottawa on August 21, 1858 Douglas made this statement early in his speech: "I have known him (Lincoln) for nearly twenty-five years. There were many points of sympathy between us. . . . I was a school teacher in the town of Winchester, and he a flourishing grocery-keeper in the town of Salem. (Applause and laughter)."

Mr. Lincoln opened his argument with Douglas in these words: "When a man hears himself somewhat misrepresented, it provokes him—at least, I find it so with myself; but when the misrepresentation becomes very gross and palpable, it is more apt to amuse him. (Laughter)."

Lincoln then goes on to discuss some politically important questions in which he had been misrepresented, passing by the more personal allusions until later in the speech when he says: "Now I pass on to consider one or two more of these little follies. The Judge is woefully at fault about his early friend Lincoln being a 'grocery keeper.' (Laughter). I don't know as it would be a great sin, if I had been, but he is mistaken. Lincoln never kept a grocery anywhere in the world. (Laughter)."

Abraham Lincoln in his speech at Charleston, Illinois during the debate on September 18, 1858 gave the definition of a forgery: "What is a forgery? It is the bringing forward something in writing or in print purporting to be of certain effect when it is altogether untrue."

With this definition before us and the statement of Lincoln's that he "never kept a grocery", we are inclined to look upon this whole tavern license transaction as it is now so widely publicized as a forgery. There is a tradition extant that Berry's procedure in securing the tavern license was responsible for the immediate dissolution of the merchandise partnership of the two men at New Salem.

See *Lincoln Lore* 494, 1143.

# LINCOLN LORE

THE LINCOLN SOCIETY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

## THE LINCOLN SOCIETY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

The Lincoln Society of the University of Chicago is a non-profit organization dedicated to the study and promotion of the life and work of Abraham Lincoln. The Society was founded in 1908 and has since that time been a leading center for Lincoln scholarship. Its members are drawn from all parts of the world and include many of the most distinguished historians and biographers of Lincoln. The Society's activities include the publication of the *Lincoln Studies Review*, the organization of lectures and conferences, and the support of research in Lincoln history. The Society's headquarters are at the University of Chicago, and its offices are open to all who are interested in the life and work of Abraham Lincoln.

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Know all men by these presents, we William F. Berry, Abraham Lincoln and John Bowling Green are held and firmly bound unto the County Commissioners of Sangamon County in the full sum of three hundred dollars to which payment will and truly to be made we bind ourselves, our heirs, executors and administrators firmly by these presnets. Sealed with our seals and dated this 6th day of March A. D. 1833 - Now the condition of this obligation is such that whereas the said Berry & Lincoln has obtained a license from the County Commissioners Court to keep a tavern in the town of New Salem to continue one year. Now if the said Berry and Lincoln shall be of good behavior and observe all the laws of this state relating to tavern keepers - then this obligation to be void or otherwise remain in full force.-

Abraham Lincoln

Wm. F. Berry

Bowling Green

# LINCOLN LORE

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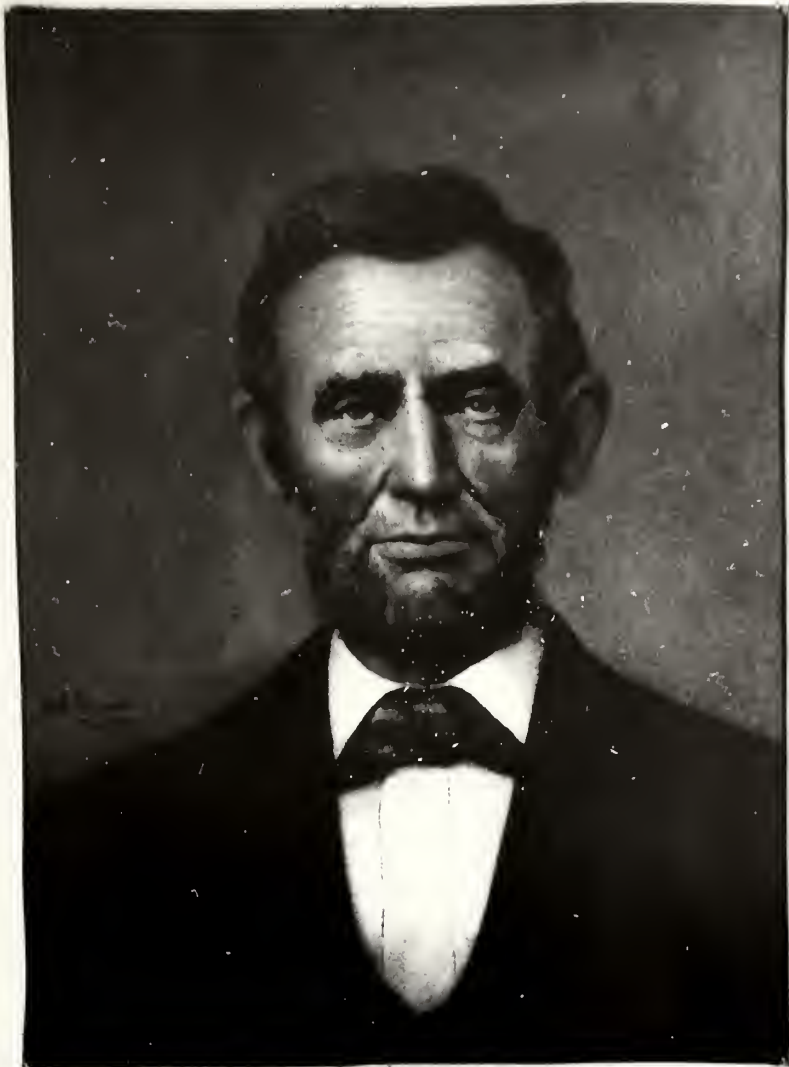
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## AN HISTORIC DOCUMENT Abraham Lincoln's Saloon License

*Springfield Record, March 7, 1853*

*Ordered that William F. Berry, in the name of Berry and Lincoln, have a license to keep a tavern in New Salem to continue twelve months from this date, and that they pay one dollar in addition to the six dollars heretofore paid as per Treasurer's receipt, and that they be allowed the following rates, viz:*

<i>French Brandy, per half pint</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Peach Brandy, per half pint</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Apple Brandy, per half pint</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Holland w<sup>m</sup>, per half pint</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Domestic Gin, per half pint</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Wine, per half pint</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Rum, per half pint</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Whisky, per half pint</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Breakfast, Dinner or Supper</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Lodging, per night</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>House, per night</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Single Bed</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Breakfast, Dinner or Supper for Stage (Coach, Passengers</i>	<i>10</i>

*Who gave bond as required by law*

As a matter of convenience, issued to Abraham Lincoln in 1833 one year before he was first elected a Representative. Copyright, C. E. O'Connell, Clive Sangamon County Court, Springfield, Ill., April 26, 1908

### Know all men by these presents:

*We, William F. Berry, Abraham Lincoln and John Tutting Green, are held and firmly bound unto the County Commissioners of Sangamon County in the full sum of three hundred dollars, to which payment well and truly to be made we bind ourselves, our heirs, executors and administrators, firmly by these presents, sealed with our seal and dated this 6th day of March, A. D. 1833. Now the condition of this obligation is such that, whereas the said Berry and Lincoln have obtained a license from the County Commissioners of Sangamon County to keep a tavern in the Town of New Salem, Illinois one year. Now if the said Berry and Lincoln shall be of good behavior and observe all the laws of this State relative to tavern-keepers, then this obligation to be void, and*

