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STORIES OF

KEWANEE

PAST & PRESENT

Dean R. Karau

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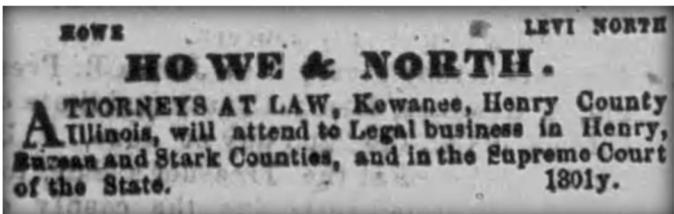
A Kewaneean Debated Abraham Lincoln.

Levi J. North came to Kewanee in 1860. But the event we're talking about happened a dozen years earlier.

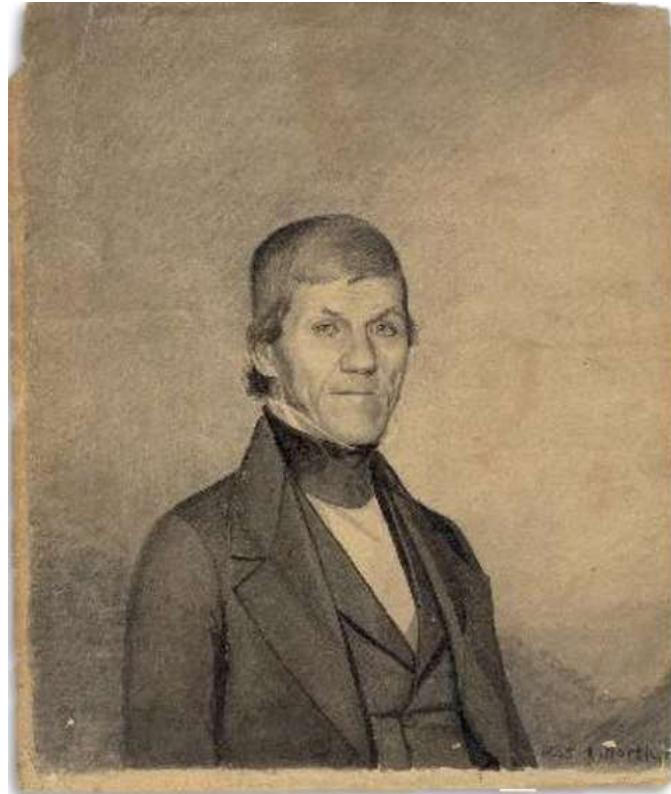
North was born in Turin, New York, in 1821. When he was five, his family moved to Mt. Vernon, Ohio. His education was generally limited to log cabin schools. At some point, North discovered art but, because his family was poor, he was generally self-taught.

In the winter of 1841-42, North attended a session of the Ohio legislature, and became fascinated by legal questions. He began reading the law and was admitted to the bar in 1845. However, North continued painting as a vocation.

In 1847, he drifted to Peoria, Illinois. After a year, he moved to Princeton where he was variously employed, including as a clerk for a local judge. In 1860, North moved to Kewanee and joined in part-



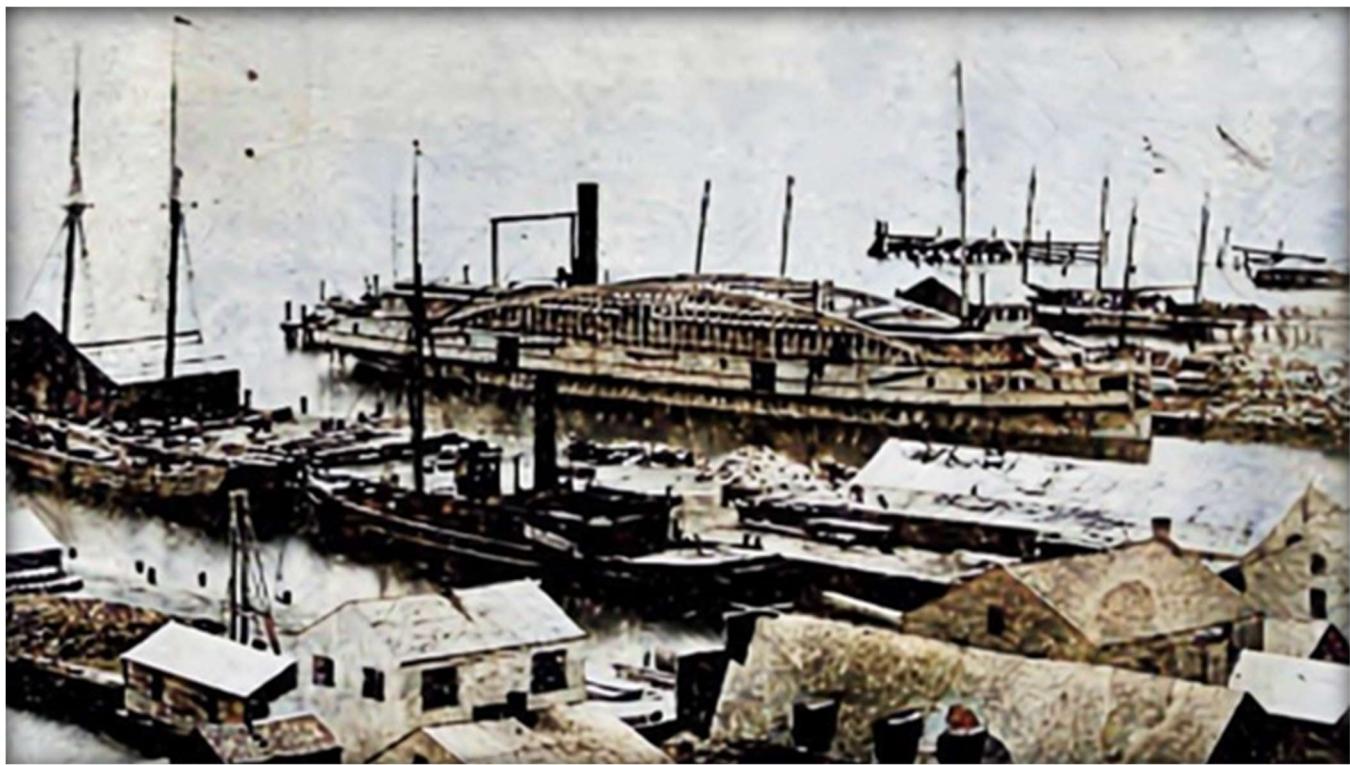
March 28, 1865, THE HENRY COUNTY
CHRONICLE.



Example of work by Levi North

nership with John H. Howe in the practice of law.

North was a staunch abolitionist, and was always ready to debate slavery and any other issue.



*The Great Lakes steamship *Globe*, ca 1860.*

In 1848, North took a trip around the Great Lakes on the *Globe*, a steamship. That's where he met Lincoln.

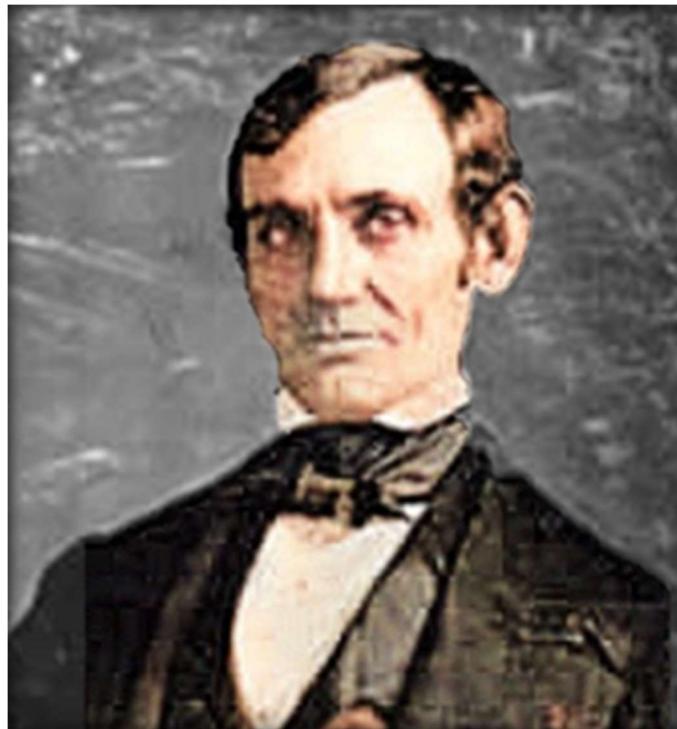
At that time, Lincoln was serving his lone term as a U. S. Representative. After Congress adjourned in August 1848, Lincoln stayed on in Washington to work on campaign documents on behalf of Zachary

Taylor. In September he went to New England and made ten speeches for the Whig cause. He was then joined by Mrs. Lincoln, sons Robert and Edward, and they took passage for Chicago on the *Globe* at Buffalo, New York.

Henry County historian Henry Kiner told part of the story. To while away the weary hours on the steamer, a political debate in the cabin was planned. The subject would be slavery. The steamer “*trembled with the white hot lightnings of his oratory.*” Next, a slavery man tried to make his case. Then, the master of ceremonies introduced as the next speaker against slavery, a member of congress from Illinois. “*He was a tall, awkward, shambling man, with high cheek bones, and an eye that glowed with fire, or twinkled with irresistible fun. And his name was Abraham Lincoln.*”

Sixteen years later North, now practicing law in Kewanee, wrote Lyman Trumbull, an Illinoisan and Lincoln ally, soliciting a political appointment. In the letter, he asked Trumbull to remind Lincoln of their meeting:

“*Mr. Lincoln may remember that in Oct. 1848, he came around the Lakes on the Steamer *Globe*, and that he and I held a debate on two days, on that trip, in which he defended Old Zack and I defended the Free Soil Platform.*”



1848 photo of Abraham Lincoln.

That letter did not net North the position he sought.

Kewanee, Ill. April 16, 1864

Hon. Lyman Trumbull,

Dear Sir—

Sometime about the 1st of March Mr. Lovejoy informed me of a desire on his part to procure for me an appointment, and specified a territorial Judgeship as one which he thought suitable to my tastes and abilities; and requested me, if I desired such a position, to at once prepare an application to the President, and procure two or three recommendations as to competency from suitable sources, and promised that he would use his influence to procure the appointment. The papers were prepared and forwarded, but arrived at Washington after he left for Brooklyn. The project was therefore defeated so far as he was concerned.

Allow me therefore as the guardian of the interests of this District since his death, to look into this matter. I will have the papers delivered to you. And if under all the circumstances you deem it proper to aid me, whether you succeed or fail, I will be much obliged to you. . . .

Should you see fit to present the matter to the President you may say to him that I am forty three years of age, was admitted to the bar in '45 in Ohio, came to this State in '47,

engaged in various kinds of business till '53, and then commenced the practice of law in Bureau Co. where I remained till 1860. As to my legal knowledge let others who know me speak. I was born a democrat and believed in Jackson. I was a Liberty Party man in '44. And Mr. Lincoln may remember that in Oct. 1848, he came around the Lakes on the Steamer *Globe*, and that he and I held a debate on two days, on that trip, in which he defended Old Zack and I defended the Free Soil Platform. This was my only acquaintance with him. I of course always afterward kept the true faith.

I felt as if a judicial position would be more acceptable to me than any other, unless it involved the necessity for legal knowledge, for though in early years I was an artist of no mean promise, I resolved upon law as my occupation. But I will say that, the Marbles of Italy, for I am fond of sculpture, and the snowy peaks of the Rocky Mountains, sometimes intrude in my dreams, and I would have asked a position abroad where I might enjoy my tastes as well as following regular pursuits, had I not felt that those places were to be occupied by others who would be more noisy in their efforts to obtain them than I could have the face to be. . . .

I am Yours Truly Levi North.



The Great Lakes cruise, however, revealed a little-known fact about Lincoln: he was an inventor.

During the exceptionally dark evening of September 28, the *Globe* passed another ship which had run aground on the shore of an island. As Lincoln watched the efforts being made to refloat the steamer by using various buoys, his thoughts turned to a riverboat experience he had had 17 years earlier in Illinois dealing with a river grounding and his attempts to use ballast to free his vessel. He had an idea.

Lincoln tinkered with it off and on over the rest of the congressional session. Then, on March 10, with a model he had made under his arm, Lincoln walked over to the U. S. Patent Office and filed his specifications and application for a patent.

North represented Henry County in the legislature in the early 1870s, contributed a revision of Illinois statutes, and later wrote a respected treatise on probate court.

North died in Kewanee in 1901.



Above: Lincoln's model, now at the Smithsonian. Below: Drawings for Lincoln's U. S. Patent No. 6,469, issued May 22, 1849.

