



News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Lincoln really did speak here

New research confirms Toulon's and Kewanee's Abraham Lincoln history

KEWANEE – Local and state historians have confirmed through new research that Abraham Lincoln spoke in Kewanee during the 1858 U.S. Senate campaign, and have placed a new date on a speech he made in nearby Toulon. The findings are the result of a collaboration between the Stark County Historical Society; the Kewanee Historical Society; and The Papers of Abraham Lincoln, a project of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.

The chief piece of evidence for both new findings was an original letter written by Lincoln on October 18, 1858 where he admits he has forgotten the name of the town in which he is to speak. The letter was written to prominent Toulon attorney and State Senator Thomas J. Henderson, who invited Lincoln to speak in Toulon and gave him a ride from the railroad station in Kewanee. Historians have known about the letter for many years, but its obscure references had been misinterpreted.

“Until now, no official historical sources that tracked Lincoln’s whereabouts in 1858 had him speaking in Kewanee,” said Daniel Stowell, editor of The Papers of Abraham Lincoln. “And we have also learned that the 99-year-old monument that memorializes Lincoln’s 1858 speech in Toulon has him visiting that town on the wrong date.”

In early 2011, local historian Floyd Ham approached The Papers of Abraham Lincoln, a project of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, concerning the date on the 1912 Old Settlers’ Monument near the Stark County Courthouse in Toulon. It bears an inscription stating that U.S. Senator Stephen A. Douglas spoke in the community on October 5, 1858 while Republican challenger Abraham Lincoln spoke the following day, October 6. Ham

felt the date of Douglas' speech should be October 26 and Lincoln's should be October 27, and wanted staff from The Papers of Abraham Lincoln to help him prove it. His chief piece of evidence was a seemingly obscure letter written by Lincoln:

Springfield, Oct. 18. 1858

Hon: T. J. Henderson:

My dear Sir

I have concluded to speak at the place you named (I forget the name of the place) on the 27th, and you may give notice accordingly.

Yours as ever,

A. LINCOLN

P.S. Write me to Macomb, the name of the place & other particulars.

A.L.

Assistant Editor Daniel Worthington of the Papers of Abraham Lincoln reviewed Ham's evidence and confirmed his suspicions that Douglas spoke in Toulon on October 26 and that Lincoln spoke there on October 27, 1858. But in the process, they also uncovered new evidence, with the help of local historians Larry Lock, Don Schmidt and Steve Morrison, that Lincoln stayed the night in Kewanee October 27 and spoke to a group of people there on October 28, 1858.

Few in Stark County disputed that Lincoln and Douglas spoke in Toulon in 1858. As early 20th century historians tried to piece together Lincoln's life, they often used reminiscences of people who were alive in the mid-1800s. Several Toulon citizens who attended the political speeches in the fall of 1858 claimed more than 40 years later that the date of Lincoln's speech was October 6. A Lincoln scholar writing in 1933 claimed the date was October 8 based primarily on another resident's recollection. Complicating matters was the fact that the September and October 1858 issues of the state's Republican newspapers, which printed Lincoln's speaking schedule, did not list Toulon.

Stark County community leaders in 1912 apparently felt that when in doubt, go with the eyewitness accounts. So the monument in Toulon lists the date of Lincoln's speech as October 6, 1858.

Exactly 50 years later, T.J. Henderson, the man to whom Lincoln wrote the letter, sought to resolve the conflicting reminiscences of the date by writing to the *Kewanee Daily Star-Courier* on September 23, 1908, insisting that Lincoln was in Toulon on October 27, and he included Lincoln's October 18 letter to support his contention. But since Lincoln never actually named Toulon, most historians thought the Lincoln letter referred to a speech in the Fulton County community of Vermont, where Lincoln was scheduled to speak October 27.

However, in mid October, Lincoln changed his speaking schedule. On October 19, 1858 the editors of the *Chicago Daily Press and Tribune* notified their Fulton and Stark County readers that Lincoln's speech in Vermont was being changed to October 26 and that Lincoln

would address the people of Toulon on October 27. But the paper stopped publishing Lincoln's itinerary several days before either of those two scheduled speeches, and there is no remaining period newspaper coverage of appearances in either community.

As a traveling candidate, Lincoln had to arrange for his mail to be delivered to the places where he planned to be. His October 18 letter instructed Henderson to write to him in Macomb regarding his speech on the 27th. Historians were certain that Lincoln traveled on the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad from Macomb to Chicago in October 1858, stopping for speeches along the way. The Kewanee depot was the closest to Toulon. The Papers of Abraham Lincoln, using the two pieces of Henderson correspondence as a guide, have confirmed that Lincoln got off the train October 27 in Kewanee, was picked up by Henderson and driven to Toulon for his speech, then driven back to Kewanee, where he spent the night. Lincoln then spoke to a small crowd in Kewanee on October 28 before departing on the train for Chicago.

“The input of local genealogists and historians is often vital in sorting out where Lincoln was and what he did in those key days before the 1858 Senate election,” said Stowell. “Recollections and reminiscences can be useful, but only if corroborated by contemporary letters, diaries or newspaper accounts. As this case shows, new discoveries can alter the meaning of original documents, and confirm a community's 153-year-old Lincoln heritage.”

This new research has substantially changed several October 1858 entries in *The Lincoln Log* (www.thelincolnlog.org), the definitive, on-line listing of all Abraham Lincoln's known daily activities. The Papers of Abraham Lincoln took the text of *Lincoln Day by Day* (1960), put it into electronic format in 2003, and have been making periodic updates since then.

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