

**Monument on the site of famous debate. Dedication exercises held yesterday on anniversary of Lincoln and Douglas meeting. By Lutz White. In the Aurora Beacon-News. [193-].**

**MONUMENT ON THE SITE OF FAMOUS DEBATE**

Dedication Exercises Held Yesterday on Anniversary of Lincoln and Douglas Meeting

BY LUTZ WHITE

In the Aurora Beacon-News

Seventy years ago, yesterday, Abraham Lincoln—then a candidate for the United States senate, against Stephen A. Douglas—by an odd combination of circumstances, made a speech in Hickory Grove, Turner Junction, Ill., before a mass meeting and picnic at which Stephen A. Douglas, his opponent, was speaker and guest of honor. Lincoln's presence at this assemblage was unannounced, unexpected and accidental and the incident affords a most absorbing episode in the annals of Lincolnians.

Yesterday this occasion was commemorated, by appropriate services at the historic spot, under the auspices of the Woman's club of West Chicago (Turner Junction), at which a majestic grey granite boulder monument was dedicated in honor of the event. The bronze tablet to be installed thereon reads:

During the senatorial contest between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas, a debate was held at this place, Aug. 28, 1858.

Erected by the West Chicago Women's club.

An Unscheduled Meeting

During the last few years, while delving rather deeply into local history, and interviewing old settlers, the writer has frequently met a persistent but vague tradition among the old timers of Aurora, that a Lincoln-Douglas debate was held at Turner Junction (West Chicago) in 1858, within the period of the historic joint meetings thruout the state. This tradition I discredited, in part, believing my informants were mistaken as to Lincoln's appearance at chronicled in history and again, (the main reason for doubt) in the arrangement for the itinerary, Lincoln and Douglas had specifically agreed

not to meet in joint debate in their own congressional districts. Turner Junction was then in the old Second congressional—Douglas' district. I reasoned that such a debate could not have been—but still the tradition persisted.

Hearing of the dedicatory exercises to be held at West Chicago yesterday I determined to attend and hear the story—which I did. The John C. Nelluoñ passed on at 96 years Mrs Nelluoñ at 92 years— fact that Lincoln spoke at this Douglas meeting 70 years ago was verified at the meeting by seven living witnesses, who had heard the great emancipator speak from a hayrack on that memorable occasion —Mrs. Allen A. Gokey, C. W. Roundy, Annie Ward Gladding, C. E. Norris, C. E. Bolles and Mrs. Lavina Parker Campbell. Also a sworn statement was read from Mrs. Emory Watson, now living at Elgin, Ill., verifying the facts.

### How Lincoln Happened to Be There

Aug. 27, 1858—the day previous to the Turner Junction meeting—Lincoln and Douglas met at Freeport in their second scheduled debate. After the meeting Douglas left for Turner Junction, where he was announced to speak the next day. Lincoln departed at the same time for Blackberry (Elburn) to visit a cousin, Mr. Moran, who lived there. He stayed all night and intended going to Peoria the next day. Now we will let the sworn statement of Mrs. Watson of Elgin, Ill., read at the meeting, tell the rest of the story.

### Mrs. Watson's Statement

“I—Mrs. Emory Watson—being duly sworn, declare the following to be my statement:

“That Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas were running against each other for United States senator for Illinois in 1858, and that year I was captain of a society called the ‘Ever Readys’ at Blackberry, Ill., (now Elburn), I being a Democrat.

“There was also a Republican society called the ‘Lincoln True Hearts’ in Blackberry too, and we had all planned to come over to Turner Junction (now West Chicago) Aug. 28, 1858, to attend a big political meeting there. Mr. Douglas was advertised to speak.

“Mr. Lincoln, who was visiting a cousin, Mr. Moran, about three miles from Blackberry, intended to go over to Turner Junction to catch a train and was going to ride over in the hayrack with the ‘Lincoln True Hearts,’ but when he came up to the village they had gone, so he rode over with us—in the ‘Ever Ready’ hay rack. And when he reached Turner Junction he found he had missed his train, so they asked him if he would not go up to the Updike Hickory grove (bought by John C. Neltnor 10 years

later and, I understand, now owned by his daughter and son in law, Mr. and Mrs. F. D. Anthony) as there was a big crowd assembled to hear Douglas.

“Mr. Lincoln consented to go and he spoke from a hayrack under an oak tree on the west side of the yard, not far from where the house now stands. Mr. Lincoln spoke first and Mr. Douglas after. black letters on them representing the different states of the union. I was Texas. Late in the day it rained very hard and the black letters ran into the blue sashes.

“We all brought our lunches and there was a great crowd. People came from all over. I remember the date very well as it was on that day I met Mrs. Norris for the first time. She afterwards became my sister in law.

“MRS. EMORY WATSON”.

From others present at the exercises it is learned that Lincoln spoke upon invitation from Douglas himself. He delivered a short address from the hayrack, while later Douglas delivered an oration that lasted two hours. Lincoln was more of a guest than an active participant—until his train departed.

#### Credit to the Woman's Club

Such are the authenticated facts of the oft discredited story of the Lincoln-Douglas debate at Turner Junction. The Woman's club of West Chicago deserves much credit for substantiating the facts and preserving this historical data. Before furthering the monument project, they verified their own evidence from the files of the Chicago Times and The Aurora Beacon-News; and other authorities, regarding the itinerary of Lincoln during the period of the debates.

At the services yesterday the principal address was delivered by the Rev. John Norris Hall of Batavia, Ill., a Lincolnian of prominence. He reviewed the career of Lincoln from the cradle to the presidency and also presented some interesting and enlightening facts regarding the loyal services of Mrs. Lincoln. The Reverend Mr. Hall exhibited some fascinating relics of the martyr president, including a commission to his father signed by Lincoln.

#### Old Hickory Grove

Some years after the historic debate, old Hickory grove was purchased by John C. Neltner and is now one of the most beautiful wooded estates in northern Illinois. Mr. Neltner has been a druggist and chemist in the Junction for about 70 years. For varying periods of time he was also editor and publisher, nurseryman, postmaster, and occupied various positions in the village administration. He was justice of the peace for 50 years. The venerable and spacious home is now occupied by Mr. and



Mrs. Frank D. Anthony, his daughter and son in law. Previous to the white man's advent this natural grove was the scene of the Pottawattomie Indian annual pow wow.

In 1935 Mr. Neltner is 93 years old, Mrs. Neltner 91 and they have

In closing, a thought intrudes upon my reveries. With all its wealth of associated historic lore, why did old "Turner Junction" see fit to sacrifice its individuality and change its name into an adjective of Chicago?

---

Exchange Mrs. F. D. Anthony Feb. 24, 1939

---

18/63d copy 4