

Newsletter

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Was Adlai Stevenson Sympathetic to the South?

This newsletter has read accounts that claim Stevenson was a member of the Knights of the Golden Circle, which was sympathetic to the South and yet other accounts that said that even though he was a War Democrat, he still believed in the cause of the North. Politics were absolutely brutal during this period. So we'll leave it to you, the reader, to decide. The quote below is from a former editor of the Metamora Sentinel. What do you think?

“William Whiffen’s testimony directly charges that Adlai E. Stevenson was an active member of the notorious organization known as “Sons of Liberty” or sometimes known as the “Knights of the Golden Circle.” and specifies sundry occasions on which he was present and acting among its leading spirits. How is this a War Record for the dark days of 1864? Here is an opening for more explanations.

“State of Illinois, McLean county, William Whiffen of the county and State aforesaid, on oath disposes and says that he was a resident of the county of Woodford, in the state of Illinois, from August in the year 1851 to February in the year 1866 and during that time was editor and proprietor of the Woodford Sentinel, a newspaper published at Metamora Illinois, and said County of Woodford and during that time was personally acquainted and politically associated with Adlai E. Stevenson and that affiant was present at the organization of the Metamora Lodge, or Circle, of the Order of American Knights, or Sons of Liberty, in the lower southeast corner of the courthouse in Metamora, by WG Ewing, special agent of the state organization of the same; Stevenson was there present and with others was duly initiated, and took the required oaths and received the grips and password; that affiant was also present at the county organization. of the nights or Sons of Liberty, held in the City of Springfield in 1864 and that Adlai Stevenson was a delegate to the state Council from the lodge or order of the same from the county of Woodford.

“The affidavit further avers that on the receipt of the news of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, the said Adlai E. Stevenson stated, in substance, that it was a good thing, and ought to have been done sooner. “That affiant avers that the Order of the American Knights, or Sons of Liberty, were organizations similar in their character to the order known as the Knights of the Golden Circle, and affiant was informed by the organizing agent, WG Ewing, that said organization stood in the same relation to the north that the Knights of the Golden Circle did to the south; that the affiant was president at the organization of three or four lodges or circles in the county of Woodford Illinois when the same we're organized. All said meetings were held in secret with closed doors and darkened windows, and we're especially antagonistic to the Union Leagues, and were organized for the purpose of offsetting the influence of that organization.”

Bloomington Pantagraph October 13, 1874

FIVE HORSES DEAD AS RESULT OF BOLT

Metamora Herald, May 23, 1913

While plowing on his farm 3 miles west of Metamora, Philip Maser and his young son saw an approaching storm and headed for the barn until the storm passed. But before they could reach shelter, a single bolt of lightning hit the son's gang plow with 4 horses and his father's sulky plow with 3 horses. The two teams were 50 feet apart when struck.

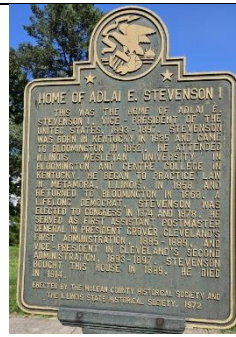
Both were knocked from their seats. When they arose, they found 5 of their horses dead.

Neighbors immediately volunteered to help Maser finish his plowing and planting.

Maser's insurance valued the 5 dead horses at \$1,000, 2/3 of which was covered by their insurance.

The storm also hit the AC Church in Roanoke and the depot at Cazenovia.





This is the house on the northeast corner of Chestnut and McLean that Adlai and Letitia Stevenson moved into in the 1880's in Bloomington. It originally had extremely ornate brackets, several decorative porches with high columns, and a widow's walk.

Several prominent neighbors lived nearby including Governor Fife, who gave the speech at Old Settlers when Metamora turned ownership of the Courthouse over to the State of Illinois. Fife's daughter who became the first female Senator in Illinois also lived there.

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Maria Spiers

(Sometimes spelled Speirs)



J. C. Irving recalled sitting on this bench as a child while Lincoln sat on a chair in the barroom with his feet sticking through the open window as he conversed with his friends gathered outside. The woman is Mrs. Maria Spiers, proprietress, as she appeared in her later years.

- Proprietor of the Metamora House
- Born in England in 1821
- Came to America as a young girl with her parents Charles and Margaret Hugill
- Married Thomas and moved from Morgan County to Metamora in 1855
- Bought the Metamora House
- Metamora House guests included Abraham Lincoln, Adlai Stevenson, David Davis, Robert Ingersoll, and other prominent attorneys
- Robert Ingersoll had a branch office in Metamora with Bob Cassell
- Was affectionately known as "Mother Speirs" and "Aunt Maria"
- She was known for her warm and sympathetic manner
- Husband Thomas died in 1867
- Maria died in 1913 at the age of 92
- The inn operated 72 years
- It was torn down in 1915

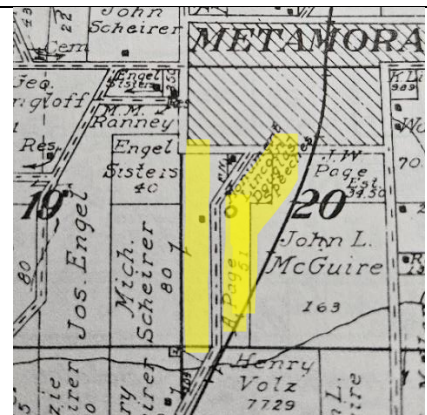
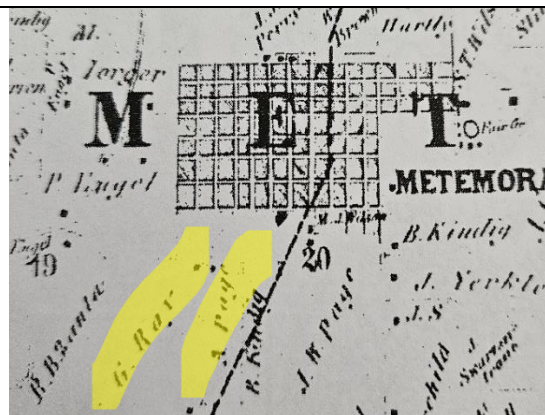
Mary Ray and the Lincoln Douglas Senate Debate in 1858

From the Woodford County Journal, March 25, 1909

- Mary Ray and her family lived across the road from Page Grove, where the Lincoln-Douglas debates were held. Today this is Lincoln Douglas Park.
- Her father was the Woodford County sheriff. He knew Lincoln from his days of carrying gold collected for taxes to Springfield.
- Mary recalls the debates on October 30, 1858 (Douglas) and October 4, 1858 (Lincoln).
- Mary thought that 10,000 to 20,000 people attended Douglas' appearance. The platform he spoke on collapsed and he finished his speech on the bandwagon.
- Lincoln's procession was over a mile long.
- Lincoln repeated his well-known theme and had a banner behind him that said, "A house divided against itself cannot stand" during his speech in Metamora.
- There was also a painted banner behind him of a ship in a storm. Lincoln turned to the painting and in a loud, emphatic voice said, "Don't give up the ship." "This brought down the house."
- Mary said, "Some of the guests went to town to see the procession which was forming, but hastened back to tell us to remain at home; that the procession would drive past Mr. Ray's and on down the lane a half a mile to the open prairie where they would turn and retrace their steps till they reached the appointed place."

The plat map on the left is from 1865. It shows the Ray home and the property owned by the Page family.

The map on the right is from 1873 and shows the Rays no longer owned the home but shows its position it across from the location of the debate.



Contact Us

Questions, Ideas - Love to hear from you

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