



# For the People

A Newsletter of the Abraham Lincoln Association

Volume 5, Number 1

Spring 2003

Springfield, Illinois

## Lincoln Never Said That Abraham Lincoln, Cockfighting, and Animal Rights

By Thomas F. Schwartz

Two frequent questions that I have encountered in the last twenty years have been: 1) Did Lincoln endorse cockfighting? and 2) Where did Lincoln say, "I am in favor of animal rights as well as human rights. That is the way of a whole human being." Both pose interesting challenges in dealing with evidence.

Cockfighting is a blood sport that was widespread in ancient Greece, Persia, and Rome. Specially bred roosters or gamecocks are placed in a pit and fight one another, often to the death. Cockfighting was practiced in Great Britain until 1849. It was a popular sport in frontier America. Even today, cockfighting remains legal in Louisiana and a number of counties in New Mexico. Throughout the campaigns to end cockfighting, both opponents and supporters have enlisted Abraham Lincoln to their cause.

Those who claim Lincoln was a supporter of cock fighting point to a passage in William Herndon and Jesse Weik's *Life of Abraham Lincoln*:

At this time in its brief history New Salem was what in the parlance of large cities would be called a fast place; and it was difficult for a young man of ordinary moral courage to resist the temptations that beset him on every hand. It remains a matter of surprise that Lincoln was able to retain his popularity with the hosts of young men of his own age, and still not join them in their drinking bouts and carousals. "I am certain," contends one of his companions (A.Y. Ellis), "that he never drank any intoxicating

liquors—he did not even in those days smoke or chew tobacco." In sports requiring either muscle or skill he took no little interest. He indulged in all the games of the day, even to a horse race or cockfight. At one eventful chicken fight, where a fee of twenty-five cents for the entrance of each fowl was assessed, one Bap. McNabb brought a little red rooster, whose fighting qualities had been well advertised for days in advance by his owner. Much interest was naturally taken in contest. As the outcome of these contests was generally a quarrel, in which each man, charging foul play, seized his victim, they chose Lincoln umpire, relying not only on his fairness but his ability to enforce his decisions. In relating what

followed I cannot improve on the description furnished me in February 1865, by Ellis who was present.

"They formed a ring, and the time having arrived, Lincoln, with one hand on each hip and in a squatting position, cried 'Ready.' Into the ring they toss their fowls. Bap's red rooster along with the rest. But no sooner had the little beauty discovered what was to be done than he dropped his tail and ran. The crowd cheered, while Bap. in disappointment picked him up and started away, losing his quarter and carrying home his dishonored fowl. Once arrived at the latter place he threw his pet down with a feeling of indignation and chagrin. The

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## Save the Date

### April 24 Membership Event in Quincy, Illinois

A free public lecture, "The Busy Wilderness of Abraham Lincoln: Lincoln's Frontier Illinois," presented by Dr. James E. Davis, will be held Thursday, April 24 at the Quincy (Illinois) Art Center, 1515 Jersey Street.

The lecture is the latest of the Abraham Lincoln Association's outreach programs, and is cosponsored by the Historical Society of Quincy, the Historical Society of Adams County and the Quincy Society of Fine Arts. The evening will begin at 5 P.M. with hors d'oeuvres and wine, followed by the lecture at 6 P.M. The evening will conclude with coffee and dessert. The event is free and open to the public,

and is part of the Abraham Lincoln Association's mission to promote the study of Abraham Lincoln and make accessible new findings on Lincoln and his era to a broad audience.

James E. Davis is the William and Charlotte Gardner Professor of History at Illinois College in Jacksonville. He is the leading authority on the history of the Illinois frontier and author of several books, including his most recent, *Frontier Illinois*, published by Indiana University Press. Known as an energetic and innovative teacher, Davis is currently working on a book examining the Civil War through the recollections and memories of Illinois veterans.

## President's Column

By Robert S. Eckley

**A**braham Lincoln's 1860 election ushered in five decades of Republican dominance in national politics, most pronounced in the Senate (92 percent), almost as much in the presidency (85 percent), and two-thirds of the time in the House of Representatives. Industrialization followed, accompanied by outbursts of strife by labor to gain recognition. One of the most riveting events of this rivalry, which occurred exactly in the middle of this period, was the Haymarket Square melee in Chicago in 1886. Eight individuals, all Lincoln friends and associates, played key roles in the anarchists' trial, appeals, and the aftermath more than two decades after Lincoln's assassination.

On May 4, the day following a violent uprising at the McCormick Reaper Works, which ended with police firing into a crowd of workers killing and wounding several, a protest meeting was held near Haymarket Square only eight blocks west of the center of Chicago. As the rally was winding down in the evening with only a fraction of the crowd remaining, the police ordered the meeting to close. Someone threw a bomb into the ranks of the police causing serious injury. In the accompanying chaos, the police fired their weapons randomly, killing some and injuring others, including a number from their own ranks. In the end, seven police were killed and sixty injured.

Eight anarchists were tried in the case, several of whom were not present at the scene of the crime. They were charged as conspirators who convinced the unknown bomber to throw the bomb. A forty-three-year-old Civil War hero, Captain William P. Black, became the chief defense counsel. He and his brother were stepsons of a political supporter of Lincoln in Danville, where they had dinner on occasion with Lincoln when he was attending court on the Eighth Judicial

Circuit. Both brothers dropped out of college to join the Union forces in 1861, and each was seriously wounded, one at Pea Ridge and both at Prairie Grove in northwest Arkansas. According to Ward Hill Lamon, then marshal of Washington, Lincoln was so concerned about them when he learned of their wounds that he broke into tears and wired General Samuel Curtis to assist their stepfather. Captain Black, the younger, later sacrificed a promising corporate legal career in Chicago to defend the anarchists, so unpopular was their cause. At the end of the twenty-one-day trial, the verdict condemned seven to be hanged and one to a fifteen-year prison term. Aside from these tragic figures, if there was a hero in Haymarket, it was Captain Black.

Black and Leonard Swett, Lincoln's "intimate personal and political friend" during the last fifteen years of his life (in the words of David Davis), must have known one another reasonably well as founding members of the Chicago Bar Association in 1874. They had been opposing counsel in two Chicago Board of Trade cases before the Illinois Supreme Court. In the next step in the Haymarket case, the appeal to that Court, Black was joined by Swett whose audacity and courage would match his own, and whose practice, in contrast to Black's, included a familiarity with criminal law. They outlined thirty-three procedural errors in their brief for the Court, then headed by Chief Justice John M. Scott, who granted a stay of execution pending hearing of the appeal. Scott was a friend of Swett and Lincoln from Bloomington, who had replaced Davis as circuit judge when Lincoln appointed the latter to the United States Supreme Court. Scott was also one of William Herndon's Lincoln informants who in 1866 wrote of Lincoln's humor: "His mirth to me always seemed to be put on and did not properly belong there," perhaps because on at least one occasion he

had felt the point of it. Nevertheless, Scott went on to remember Lincoln's greatness: "Courage . . . that dares to do *right*, whatever may be the opinion of the world and *fears* only to do wrong," while still puzzling over Lincoln's lack of any outstanding single characteristic! In mid-September 1887 the seven-member Court issued a unanimous opinion rejecting the pleadings of Swett and Black and setting the date of November 11 for the executions.

In the penultimate step of the judicial process—the United States Supreme Court—three eminent attorneys, one of whom Lincoln knew only too well, joined Black and Swett. Benjamin F. Butler was an errant political general from Massachusetts, often described as a "firebrand," who had mixed wisdom with folly from New Orleans to Virginia and North Carolina during the Civil War. He was identified with the Radical Republicans. Later he was involved in the Andrew Johnson impeachment trial as lead speaker in the Senate. In the Haymarket case, he cautioned that there was little expectation for the Court to intervene in an Illinois matter, although there was reason to think otherwise.

Two of the five justices appointed by Lincoln remained on the Court when the Haymarket case was considered. Samuel Miller, a doctor turned attorney, migrated to Iowa from Kentucky to avoid slavery. He and Stephen Field, also appointed by Lincoln, wrote many dissents in their long tenures on the Court (not surpassed in number until after John Marshall Harlan was added to the Court as a replacement for David Davis in 1877). Miller was viewed as a liberal and wrote the decision in the Slaughterhouse cases in 1873, which was hailed as a great win for Negro rights at the time, until its limiting features were used by southern states to create the Jim Crow laws of the 1890s.

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## Member News

The University of Nebraska Press has published a new edition of James Rawley's *Abraham Lincoln and a Nation Worth Fighting For*.

Robert Provost announced that the Lincoln Center in Tirana, Albania, would be moving into new quarters. The home of the late dictator Enver Hoxha will soon house the staff and activities of the Lincoln Center.

Eugene F. Fairbanks, son of the late sculptor Avard T. Fairbanks, has compiled a book *Abraham Lincoln Sculpture: Created by Avard T. Fairbanks*. It can be ordered at <http://www.fairbanksartbooks.com>.

Duke Russell held his 11th annual Abraham Lincoln Remembrance in Los Angeles on February 12. Actor Hal Holbrook reciting the Gettysburg Address highlighted the ceremony.

Logan County "Looking for Lincoln" produced a video of Lincoln sites in Logan County, Illinois.

Longtime Association member Ted A. Chuman passed away on December 18, 2002, after a brief illness.

The Association is also saddened by the death of member Gordon Thomas.

The city of Chicago Heights is raising money to erect a sculpture of Lincoln at the Lincoln and Dixie high-

ways crossroads. John Bucci created a figure of a beardless Lincoln receiving violets from a girl.

Richard Wengenroth painted a series of six portraits depicting Abraham Lincoln at various stages of his life. Limited edition prints are available by calling 212.243.7137.

Don Pollack opened an exhibit of his paintings, "A Search for Heroes, Lincoln and the Illinois Landscape," at the Perimeter Gallery, 210 W. Superior in Chicago.

Allen Guelzo wrote an editorial on the Emancipation Proclamation for the January 1, 2003, issue of the *Washington Post*.

George Craig, a tireless advocate for Lincoln and Civil War studies, died on Sunday, February 9, 2003, just shy of his eighty-eighth birthday. He was instrumental in raising funds to refurbish General George H. Thomas's grave marker in Troy, New York. As the first and only chair of the Civil War Round Table of New York's Benjamin Barondess Lincoln Award Committee, Craig honored the best Lincoln books over a forty-year period. He frequently traveled to Springfield to partake in Lincoln activities.

It is also with great sadness to report the passing of Michael Maione, Site Superintendent at Ford's Theatre.

Hay-Nicolay Dissertation Prize  
Awarded to Graham Peck

Graham Peck, who teaches at St. Xavier University in Chicago, received the 2003 Hay-Nicolay Dissertation Prize at the fifth annual Lincoln Conference of the Abraham Lincoln Institute, Inc. (formerly known as the Lincoln Institute of the Mid Atlantic). Peck is a graduate of Northwestern University and studied with James Oakes. The title of his dissertation, "The Social and Cultural

Origins of Sectional Politics: Illinois from Statehood to Civil War," examines the evolution of the party system in Illinois and the eventual competing ideologies of Stephen A. Douglas and Abraham Lincoln. The Lehrman Institute provides the \$5,000 prize. The jury consists of representatives from the Abraham Lincoln Association, the Abraham Lincoln Institute, Inc., and the Lehrman Institute.

## February 12, 2003

The Abraham Lincoln Association celebrated the 194th anniversary of Lincoln's birth in grand fashion. The day began with an update from Dr. Daniel Stowell, director, and the talented staff of the Lincoln Legal Papers. Over half of the fifty-five cases comprising four published volumes have been completed with many others nearly complete. Dr. Glenna Schroeder-Lein is finalizing the forms and database for the nationwide search for correspondence to and from Abraham Lincoln for the Papers of Abraham Lincoln project. At the Board of Directors semi-annual meeting, a number of new faces were added to the ranks while old friends stepped down to pursue other interests. Those leaving the board are Lewis Lehrman, Norman Hellmers, and John Trutter. Robert J. Lenz, Marvin Sanderman, and Dr. Vibert White replaced them. Joining the ranks of Emeritus Director are John Trutter and Harlington Wood, Jr. Much of the discussion concerned planning for the future. What role will the Association play in the new Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum? What are appropriate ways to commemorate Lincoln's birthday in 2009?

The symposium took place in the Hall of Representatives to a near capacity crowd with Kim Bauer presiding. Professors David Blight, Brian Dirck, and Kent Gramm treated the audience to thoughtful papers with comments by Silvana Siddala. Drawing upon the theme, "Lincoln in Memory and Imagination," each presenter explored aspects of Lincoln and memory.

"Lincoln and Humor," was the banquet address delivered by retired Admiral William J. Crowe, Jr. The talk was an elegant mix of jokes and the deeper meanings of Lincoln's use of stories and anecdotes. The evening ended with a rousing rendition of Julia Ward Howe's, "Battle Hymn of the Republic."



*Kim Matthew Bauer introduces the symposium panel, (l to r) Kent Gramm, Silvana Siddali, Brian Dirck, and David Blight.*



*Authors Kent Gramm and Dan Monroe sign copies of their books for the public.*



*Banquet Speaker  
Admiral William J. Crowe, Jr., delivering  
the punch line to a Lincoln joke.*



*Abraham Lincoln Association  
President Robert S. Eckley*



*Maynard Crossland, Director of the  
Illinois Historic Preservation Agency,  
providing a brief update on the Abraham  
Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.*



*Victoria Whitlow, Miss Springfield, leading  
the audience in the  
"Battle Hymn of the Republic."*

## Lincoln Never Said That Abraham Lincoln, Cockfighting, and Animal Rights

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little fellow, out of sight of all rivals, mounted a wood pile and proudly flirting out his feathers, crowed with all his might. Bap. looked on in disgust. ‘Yes, you little cuss,’ he exclaimed, irreverently, ‘you’re great on dress parade, but not worth a d—n in a fight.’” It is said—how truthfully I do not know—that at some period during the late war Mr. Lincoln in conversation with a friend likened McClellan to Bap. McNabb’s rooster. So much for New Salem sports.<sup>1</sup>

Based upon evidence presented in this passage, one could claim that Lincoln, by agreeing to serve as judge of the cockfight, shows his support for the blood sport. At the very least, Lincoln would not appear to have any qualms about the sport. Almost all of the evidence in the passage claims to be based upon the recollections of Abner Y. Ellis who was an associate of Lincoln’s at New Salem, Illinois. But in comparing the Herndon/Weik account with Ellis’s letter to William Herndon, a number of disturbing discrepancies appear.

It is best to reproduce the appropriate portion of Ellis’s actual letter to Herndon, dated February 1, 1866, not 1865:

You ask Me in the one Just recvd to relate Some of the Storys & anecdotes as told by Mr Lincoln whether smutty or chast this is hard to do as there are but few if any who can tell them so well as he Could. However as You have promised that No one Shall ever see them but your self I will endeavor do so though Many of them you have heard before

First; Bap McNabbs Red Rooster I early times the Boys in and about old Sangamon Town got up a Free chicken fight or free to all to Enter his rooster by payin 25 cts entrance fee

Well Bap had a verry Splendid Red Rooster and he with others was entered

Well the eventful day arrived and

Bap with his little Beauty was their in all his splendere.

The time arrives and into the ring they toss their chickens Baps with the rest but no sooner had the little beauty discovered what was to be done he dropped his tale and run



*Statue of Abraham Lincoln in  
Manchester, England*

Bap being very much disappointed picked him up and went home loosing his quarter & dishonored chicken

and as soon as he got home he tossed his pet down in the yard on his own dung hill—The little fellow then stood up & flirted out his beautiful feathers & crowed as brave as a Lion. Bap Viewed closely & remarked

Yes You dam little cuss you are Great on a parade but you are not worth a Dam in a fight

it is said that Mr L remarked to a friend soon after McClellands fizzle before Richmond That Little McClelland reminded him of Bap McNabbs Little Red Rooster.<sup>2</sup>

The most obvious difference is that Ellis makes no mention of Lincoln’s involvement in the actual cockfight.

Lincoln is not a judge of the match nor is it clear that he is even present to witness the match. Lincoln may well have heard of the incident second or third hand but repeated the story for its illustrative meaning. And it is for this reason that Ellis recounts the story as an example of Lincoln’s humor, not as an incident from New Salem. Lincoln allegedly used the story when referring to Major General George McClellan. Neither Ellis nor Herndon/Weik provide a source to whom Lincoln supposedly related the story in Washington, D.C. The location of the cockfight is Sangamo Town, a community located between New Salem and Springfield. It was in Sangamo Town where Lincoln assisted in building the flatboat that carried Denton Offutt’s goods to New Orleans. The grist and sawmill in Sangamo Town did a much larger business than the Cameron/Rutledge mill in New Salem. If the story is to be used to document an event from Lincoln’s early life, it should be Lincoln’s relationship with Sangamo Town.

The Ellis recollection is transformed further by Thomas P. Reep, who, in *Lincoln at New Salem* (1927), uses the Herndon/Weik account and adds his own embellishments:

One of Lincoln’s most striking faculties was that of remembering incidents that had attracted his attention and using them in illustrating any point he desired to make. It is said that

*For the People* (ISSN 1527–2710) is published four times a year and is a benefit of membership of the Abraham Lincoln Association  
1 Old State Capitol Plaza  
Springfield, Illinois  
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Newsletter design by  
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following one of McClellan's "strategic retreats" Lincoln likened him to Bab McNabb's rooster. Bab McNabb was a New Salem "sport" and on a visit to Springfield found a very handsome appearing fighting cock for which he traded and which he took to New Salem. With Bab's connivance word got to the Clary's Grove boys that he had a wonderful fighting cock and a challenge to combat immediately followed. The preliminaries agreed upon, on the day set the sports all repaired to the cock pit, said by local tradition to have been on the west slope of the ridge between the Offut store and Clary's grocery. Betting, as usual, was brisk and Lincoln was elected to referee the bout. The two cocks were dropped into the pit. The local bird came from a long line of royal progenitors and knew the game for which it had been bred. It advanced cautiously toward its opponent, upon which the much-heralded stranger beat a hasty retreat and in a moment was "running rings" around the pit. Bab, with an expression of disgust, leaped into the pit and seizing his bird flung it out and into the air. It lit on a pile of saplings near by, that had been cut and hauled for wood, and stretching its neck and flapping its wings crowed lustily. All eyes were on the bird, when Bab in withering tones said—"Yes, you little devil! You are *great* on dress parade, but not worth a d—n in a *fight*."<sup>3</sup>

Reep restores Ellis's original

meaning to the story by using it to illustrate Lincoln's use of humor. But in assuming that the story had its origins in New Salem based upon an actual event in which Lincoln served as judge, Reep firmly places the incident within the New Salem tradition. The errors of Herndon/Weik, compounded by Reep, have led supporters of cockfighting to accept something that cannot be documented from Ellis's account, Lincoln serving as a judge for a cockfight. But if Lincoln did not endorse cockfighting, did he endorse "animal rights?"

Most recollections that relate to Lincoln's treatment of animals indicate that he was repulsed by animal cruelty whether inflicted by humans or by other animals. Several times, I have been asked to verify a quote attributed to Lincoln stating: "I am in favor of animal rights as well as human rights. That is the way of a whole human being." The utterance is found in Jon Wynne-Tyson, ed., *The Extended Circle: A Dictionary of Humane Thought* (Fontwell, England: Centaur Press, 1985), 179. A careful search of Lincoln's writing fails to turn up this quote or anything similar to it. The Fehrenbachers excluded it from consideration along with several others as "spurious." Although some Web sites continue to post this quote attributing it to Lincoln, one site, [www.all-creatures.org](http://www.all-creatures.org), has this editorial note: "There is considerable doubt that these

quotes can be attributed to President Abraham Lincoln. The only references seem to be third party ones with unverifiable original references. We, and others, have found no such quote references in any of Lincoln's writings or in authoritative works on Lincoln. We have included these quotes on this site only because of their wide spread use."<sup>4</sup> Lincoln never uses the phrase "animal rights" in any of his writings and uses the phrase "human rights" but four times.<sup>5</sup> The phrases clearly have a modern tone. If Lincoln never judged cockfights, he also never addressed the question of animal rights.

<sup>1</sup>Paul Angle, ed., *Herndon's Life of Lincoln* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1949), 96–97.

<sup>2</sup>Abner Y. Ellis to William Henry Herndon, Feb. 1, 1866, microfilm reel 8, frames 565–66, Herndon/Weik Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Reep, *Lincoln at New Salem* (Petersburg, Ill.: Old Salem Lincoln League, 1927), 71–72.

<sup>4</sup>[http://www.all-creatures.org/lincoln\\_abraham.html](http://www.all-creatures.org/lincoln_abraham.html).

<sup>5</sup>Lincoln's most notable use of "human rights" is in his letter to the workingmen of Manchester, England. But even here, Lincoln's words have been altered on the base of the statue in Manchester to reflect current sensibilities. "Workingmen" has been changed to "Workingpeople."

## APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

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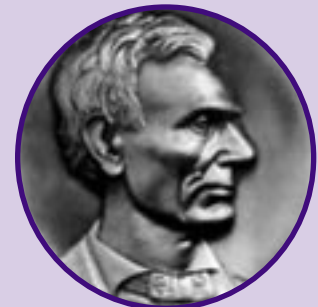
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## President's Column

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Field, a conservative from California, was the brother of David Dudley Field, who has escorted Lincoln to the platform in New York City early in 1860 for his crucial Cooper Union speech, where he gained visibility and stature among eastern Republicans. None of these three great dissenters found any basis for accepting the Haymarket case, and the Supreme Court rejected it unanimously.

During the year and one-half that the trial and appeals were pending or underway, public interest and opinion were building, not just in Chicago and the Midwest, but nationwide and abroad. One who took an active part in this was Lincoln's political associate, friend, and sometimes adversary, Lyman Trumbull. In 1855, Trumbull was an anti-Nebraska Democrat who won the United States Senate election over Lincoln in the Illinois Legislature because none of the five members of his faction would vote for a Whig, despite the fact that Lincoln started well ahead of him in the ballots. Lincoln released his votes to Trumbull to prevent the Douglas Democratic candidate from winning. Mary Todd Lincoln never forgave Trumbull's wife, although Julia

Jayne had been her wedding attendant. Both men became Republicans a year later, and Trumbull served three terms in the Senate, where he was Chairman of the Judiciary Committee. Generally supportive of Lincoln, Trumbull was among the leaders of the Republican caucus that tried to force a Cabinet reorganization in December 1862, which Lincoln skillfully deflected. Notwithstanding his association with Radical Republicans, Trumbull was one of the seven Republicans that voted to acquit Andrew Johnson in 1868, any one of whom cast the deciding vote. In 1876 he returned to the Democratic party. When approached to sign the petition of the Amnesty Association on behalf of the condemned Haymarket men, he exclaimed, "I will sign. These men did not have a fair trial."

One recourse remained—in the executive clemency powers entrusted to the governor of Illinois. Governor Richard Oglesby was serving for the third time in that capacity. At the state nominating convention in Decatur twenty-seven years earlier, Oglesby had established the "railsplitter" image for Lincoln's 1860 campaign for the presidency, and he had heard Lincoln speak twenty years earlier at a Whig

rally in Springfield in 1840. Both read law in Springfield, and Oglesby supported Lincoln in both of his Senate campaigns. When the Civil War began, Oglesby led a regiment from Decatur and quickly rose to the rank of major general after several engagements and acquiring a mini-ball near his heart at Corinth, Mississippi. That reminder he carried the rest of his life. Elected governor for the first time in 1864, he was in Washington and called on Lincoln on the day of the assassination and was later present as he died.

Governor Oglesby received thousands of pleas for clemency in the Haymarket case in the days leading up to November 11. Two of the anarchists requested clemency, and their sentences were commuted to life imprisonment. One committed suicide with dynamite hidden in a cigar the day before the remaining four were taken to the gallows. This finished but did not end one of the most troubling episodes in American history. (In 1893, John Peter Altgeld became the first Democratic governor in thirty-six years and pardoned the three remaining prisoners a few months after taking office—four year later, the Republicans regained the governorship).

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