Dr. Charles Leib: Lincoln’s Mole?

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Abraham Lincoln’s fondness for “slightly damaged characters” has been aptly noted by David Donald, who cites such raffish individuals as Mark Delahay, Ward Hill Lamon, and even Billy Herndon as cases in point.¹ These individuals, though loyal and faithful to Lincoln personally and professionally—and in their ways effective—were sometimes possessed of exaggerated notions of their own importance, or guilty of behavior that might border on the ridiculous, or flawed by such excesses as out-of-control drinking. None of these was ever called a scoundrel, however, as has recently been the case with another Lincoln associate, the mysterious and shifty Dr. Charles Leib.² After Lincoln’s nomination in 1860, Leib’s loyalty and fidelity to the future president seem to have been consistent and beyond question, and perhaps reciprocated by Lincoln, but before that time his allegiance seems murky indeed and the possible reciprocity by Lincoln at best to be inferred. Quite simply, however, it seems obvious that Abraham Lincoln knew and approved of Charles Leib’s efforts to divide the Illinois Democratic party thus to defeat Stephen A. Douglas and to ensure victory for Lincoln; to at least tacitly form an alliance between antislavery Republicans and proponents of the Lecompton Constitution. There seems reason also to believe that Lincoln at least approved of efforts to reward Leib for his services to the Republican party. But that others were outraged at Leib’s behavior then (before 1860, that is) and now, is not difficult to understand.

The senatorial campaign of 1858 was the beginning of uneasy political alliance. Stephen A. Douglas’s vehement opposition to the Lecompton Constitution for Kansas, known since November 1857 and first publicly pronounced on December 9 of that year, left Illinois Republicans unsettled, for they could perceive the attractiveness of Douglas’s position, especially to Republicans of Democratic antecedents. Some Illinois Republican leaders were

¹ David Herbert Donald, Lincoln (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 266.
concerned over the possible division of their party by the charismatic Douglas, whose appeal was enhanced by his anti-Lecompton stance, and some feared that Douglas could co-opt the Republicans. “There is a general determination to sustain Douglas in his course,” wrote former Jacksonian Ebenezer Peck to Lyman Trumbull in early December, whereas editor Charles H. Ray of the Chicago Press and Tribune, opined that “from all that I see and know that he [Douglas] is coming among us; and that we have got him to deal with in our own camp.”

Anticipating collaboration between Republicans and Senator Douglas, old Illinois Democratic warhorse John Reynolds wrote Trumbull in January that “It is a strange spectacle to see you and Senator Douglas pulling at the same cord.” In the late winter and early spring of 1858, Illinois Republicans discussed ways of reconciling their identity and integrity with Douglas’s new stance, with some suggesting some sort of alliance between Republicans and Douglas and his followers.

But shortly after the first of the year other possibilities arose. From April to the end of the campaign, Republican leaders and opinion makers became more confident as it became apparent to them that there was no unanimity among Democrats over Stephen A. Douglas, that indeed there was more likelihood of significant Democratic division than of Republican defections. Republicans would continue to accept overtures from Douglas and his followers but only on the Republicans’ terms. They also beheld with gratification the spectacle of Buchanan administration supporters rallying against Douglas. Indeed, Republicans came not only to watch such divisions develop, they did what they could to actively encourage them and even to collude with their leaders, creating the

3. Peck to Trumbull, December 2, 1857, Ray to Trumbull, March 9, 1858, Lyman Trumbull Papers (microfilm edition); Trumbull to Lincoln, January 3, 1858, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.
4. Reynolds to Trumbull, January 4, 1858, Trumbull Papers.
5. Jesse K. DuBois to Trumbull, March 22, April 8, 1858, Peck to Trumbull, April 15, 1858, Trumbull Papers; Ray to Lincoln, April 14, 1858, Lincoln Papers; Abraham Jonas and Henry Asbury to Ozias M. Hatch, February 23, 1858, Jackson Grimshaw to Hatch, April 5, 1858, Ozias M. Hatch Papers, Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield.
6. Jonas to Trumbull, February 13, 1858, William Herndon to Trumbull, February 16, 1858, Norman B. Judd to Trumbull, March 19, 1858, Joseph Medill to Trumbull, April 22, 1858, Trumbull Papers; Jonas to Lincoln, July 30, August 5, 1858, Joseph T. Eccles to Lincoln, August 4, 1858, Clifton H. Moore to Lincoln, August 10, 1858, Lincoln Papers; William P. Kellogg to Jesse K. Dubois, April 25, 1858, Jesse K. Dubois Papers, Illinois State Historical Library.
arresting spectacle of Illinois Republicans cooperating with pro-Lecompton Democrats for the sake of electoral advantage. Abraham Lincoln was quite aware of this collusion, and he did not disapprove.

As early as February 19, 1858, Lincoln’s law partner, William Herndon, admitted of Republican efforts to promote a Democratic split. “We want to make it wider and deeper,” he wrote, “hotter and more impassable.” By spring Republicans were actively encouraging administration supporters to organize, and though no formal arrangement existed between the two groups, they were in frequent contact, and Republicans actively promoted the candidacies of administration supporters—“Danites,” or National Democrats, as they were increasingly known—for the General Assembly. The Chicago Tribune, however disingenuously, predicted that the Danites “alone will be recognized in the state as the legitimate Democracy.”

One of the best-known examples of this cooperation between administration supporters and Republicans was reported by Herndon to Lyman Trumbull. In July, Herndon wrote to Trumbull of a conference between Lincoln and John Dougherty, a Danite and southern Illinois lawyer and politician who was running for state treasurer. Dougherty informed Lincoln that the National Democrats intended to run a candidate for every office in every county and congressional district. Lincoln is said to have replied to Dougherty, “If you do this the thing is settled—the battle is fought.”

And late in September, a writer for the Republican Chicago Journal approached Republican Secretary of State Ozias Hatch for money he claimed was due him for writing anti-Douglas articles for the Danite Springfield newspaper, the State Democrat. James A. Clarkson, proprietor of the Democrat, had never paid him, the writer said. Clarkson claimed that “he expected $500 of Mr. Lincoln in a day or two, and as soon as he got it, he would send on the money.” The expected money never came, hence the writer’s application to

7. Herndon to Trumbull, February 19, 1858, Trumbull Papers.
8. Edward L. Baker to Trumbull, May 1, 1858, Herndon to Trumbull, June 24, 1858, July 9, 1858, Gustave Koerner to Trumbull, June 29, 1858, Trumbull Papers; Samuel Wilkinson to Lincoln, May 26, 1858, John Wentworth to Lincoln, June 6, 1858, Eccles to Lincoln, August 4 1858, Lincoln Papers.
9. Chicago Tribune, April 21, 1858.
10. Herndon to Trumbull, July 9, 1858, Trumbull Papers.
11. A. Sherman to Hatch, September 27, 1858, Hatch Papers.
a Republican officeholder for compensation for writing in a pro-
Lecompton Democratic newspaper.\textsuperscript{11}

Enter Charles Leib. His antecedents are hazy, his motives obscure, and his tracks hard to follow. Of Pennsylvania origin, he is said to have been in the same West Point class as George McClellan but to have left on account of a physical disability. Leib’s obituary reported that he had graduated from “a Philadelphia Medical College.” There is evidence that he resided in Iowa, though in an unknown capacity.\textsuperscript{12} Leib appears to have gone out to the new territory of Kansas in 1854 in the entourage of Kansas’s first governor, fellow Pennsylvanian Andrew Reeder, at whose first public function in Kansas Leib spoke. In that respect Leib can be regarded as a beneficiary of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. He took the first census in Kansas Territory and undertook to practice medicine in Leavenworth.\textsuperscript{13} Though Reeder was a Democrat, he was a victim of the seizure of the territorial legislature by Missourians in March 1855 and was thus drawn toward the Free-State cause. Perhaps appropriately then, Reeder’s friend Leib is said to have ridden, after violence broke out in Kansas, with the Free-State militia organized by the then-radical abolitionist James H. Lane. And although this is not verified, he is said later to have been a member of the unofficial Frontier Guard that Lane placed in the White House in the days immediately after the firing on Fort Sumter.\textsuperscript{14} On firmer ground, we know that after riding with Kansas Free-Staters, Leib took up residence in Illinois and edited a Democratic campaign paper in Chicago, the \textit{Democratic Bugle}, in support of James Buchanan in 1856.\textsuperscript{15} Doubtless for this service, he was the successful candidate

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\item Leib’s obituary, \textit{Arizona Miner} (Prescott), February 18, 1865. For this and other materials on Leib in Arizona, I am grateful to Nancy Sawyer, archivist at the Arizona Department of Library, Archives and Public Records in Phoenix, and personnel at the Arizona Historical Society, Tucson. See also the \textit{Rail Splitter}, June 7, July 14, 1860. All \textit{Rail Splitter} references here are to the Chicago publication.
\item “Executive Minutes: Minutes Recorded in the Governor’s Office During the Administration of Governor Andrew H. Reeder,” \textit{Kansas Historical Collections} 3 (1883–85), 247; Russell K. Hickman, “The Reeder Administration Inaugurated,” \textit{Kansas Historical Quarterly} 36 (1970), 310, 428, 440.
\item Franklin William Scott, ed., “Newspapers and Periodicals of Illinois, 1814–
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for the clerkship of the Illinois House of Representatives in 1857, where he served in January and February of that year, with the support of the majority of Democratic members and where his competence was acknowledged even by Republican observers.\textsuperscript{16}

What caused Leib to part company with the Democratic majority in Illinois after the 1857 General Assembly session is presently beyond documentation. Particularly confounding is his siding with the National Democrats against Stephen A. Douglas and tacitly favoring the Lecompton Constitution, especially if he did indeed ride with Jim Lane in the Kansas Free-State militia during the previous year. His disaffection from the Douglas Democrats was noted as early as late January 1858 when, on his endorsement, a Douglas-favoring Peoria newspaper was denied a contract for post-office printing by the Buchanan administration’s Post Office Department. A short time later he was seen in Washington, D.C., in the company of Isaac Cook, the former Chicago postmaster who had earlier been removed at Douglas’s behest. Apparently the two met with President Buchanan, and Cook’s reappointment to the Chicago post office, at the expense of a Douglas supporter, and Leib’s designation as a special agent of the Post Office Department, probably were dividends of that trip.\textsuperscript{17} In his capacity as special postal agent, Leib possessed the authority to determine the loyalty to the Buchanan administration of postmasters and other recipients of federal largesse and to recommend their removal if they were found wanting. He was very active in that regard. His potential impact on elections was considered very substantial, especially considering the number of patronage employees at the disposal of the postmaster in Chicago.

Leib’s usefulness to the cause of the Illinois Republicans in 1858 was perfectly obvious, and welcomed, for the more Douglas’s patronage could be weakened in Illinois, the fewer active local agents Douglas would have working in his behalf. Leib was early in touch with Secretary of State Ozias Hatch, whose role in Lincoln’s senatorial campaign was to be an active one; indeed Leib informed Hatch

\textsuperscript{16} Chicago Tribune, January 12, 1857, March 2, 1858; Daily Illinois State Journal (Springfield), February 25, 1857.

\textsuperscript{17} Thomas H. Harris to Charles H. Lanphier, January 21, February 9, 1858, James Sheahan to Lanphier, February 4, 1858, Charles H. Lanphier Papers, Illinois State Historical Library.

\textsuperscript{18} Hatch to Jonas and Henry Asbury, March 2, 1858, Henry Asbury Papers,
immediately upon his having been named a postal agent. Leib was in touch with Lyman Trumbull at least as early as the winter of 1857–58, when he later claimed to have told Trumbull that it was his determination that “we would have an anti-Douglas party.” George T. Brown, editor of the Republican _Alton Courier_, at one point asked Trumbull to use his good offices with Leib in behalf of a candidate for the post office in his town. And Leib very early cautioned Republican operatives and Lincoln familiars Hatch and Jesse Dubois against being tempted by overtures to them from the Douglas ranks, asserting that the Republicans were foolish to be attracted by Douglas, that they could succeed without him. Abraham Lincoln was privy to this communication at one remove; upon its receipt from Hatch he cautioned, “let us all stand firm, making no committals as to strange and new combinations.” Whether Lincoln referred to “strange and new combinations” with Douglas and his friends, or with the National Democrats, is tantalizingly unclear, though the former seems most likely. In any event, through the early autumn, Republicans found most edifying the spectacle of Douglas-supporting postmasters either being removed or brought into line through Charles Leib’s efforts. Leib also took personal credit for the organization of National Democratic meetings at the county and state level, exciting the admiration of Mark Delahay. “Leib is drilling the faithful,” wrote Delahay, who had spent some time with him. Indeed Leib at one point was so confident of his influence among Republicans that he weighed in with Hatch with

Chicago Historical Society.

19. Leib to Trumbull, July 20, 1858, George T. Brown to Trumbull, February 24, 1858, Trumbull Papers.

20. Dubois and Hatch to Lincoln, March 23, enclosing Ray to Hatch, March 20, 1858. Photostats of these letters were in the Hatch Papers, but they are now missing. Typescripts were provided to me by Professor Robert W. Johannsen.


22. Jonas to Trumbull, February 13, 1858, Trumbull Papers; Jonas and Asbury to Hatch, February 23, 1858, Hatch Papers; Jonas to Lincoln, July 3, 1858, Lincoln Papers; Isaac Cook to Sidney Breese, September 21, 1858, Sidney Breese Papers, Illinois State Historical Library. For enumerations of some of the removed postmasters, see _Daily Illinois State Journal_ (Springfield), May 27, June 30, July 23, September 9, October 5–7, October 9–11, 1858; _Illinois State Register_ (Springfield), September 29, October 4, October 8, 1858; _Chicago Times_, October 3, October 5, October 13, October 26, 1858.

23. Leib to Trumbull, July 20, 1858, Delahay to Trumbull, May 22, 1858, Trumbull
his own opinion about the appointment of the state’s adjutant general.24 Norman Judd, however, expected little in the long run from the tacit Republican alliance with Leib and other Buchanan partisans. “The Buchanan arrangement for Illinois is a failure with its present leaders,” he wrote, implicitly including Leib. “They have not the brains to take in the whole field of operations, nor the character to give them position…”25

A week following the June 9 Illinois state convention of National Democrats, a meeting that Leib helped organize, Senator Douglas took public notice on the floor of the United States Senate of the division in Illinois’ Democratic party. This was a division that was dedicated, he said, to “dividing and defeating the Democratic party, and thereby securing the election of Republicans,” and the marplot behind it all was Charles Leib. Leib acted as he did in behalf of Republicans on account of his previous connection with Jim Lane and the Free-State militia in Kansas, an association that Douglas claimed that Leib had personally admitted to him. Though Leib pretended as postal agent to be carrying out the policies of the Buchanan administration, Douglas alleged that Leib and other Danite operatives were “acting under the direction of a small squad of selfish and unscrupulous politicians…who care less for the present than the next administration.” At the bottom of it all, in “ unholy combination with the bolting Democrats” were Illinois Republicans, whose best hope of victory lay in dividing their Democratic adversaries. Lyman Trumbull responded to Douglas immediately in the Senate, denying any Republican alliance with “this man Leib…” Leib, he asserted, “is no man of ours…” and that the Republicans intended to beat both the Leib party and the Douglas party in the coming campaign.26 Trumbull immediately reported his and Douglas’s remarks to Lincoln, noting how Douglas “was very severe on Dr. Leib” and reiterating his own denial of any “affiliations or alliances” with Leib and company. Lincoln’s reply has been lost, but William Herndon saw it, and he wrote to Trumbull reaffirming Lincoln’s disavowal “of any contract with either wing of the Democracy.”27 Leib denied such an alliance later in a letter to Trumbull, but the denial of a literal “contract” or “alliance” between

24. Leib to Hatch, May 6, 1858, Hatch Papers.
25. Judd to Trumbull, April 19, 1858, Trumbull Papers.
27. Trumbull to Lincoln, June 16, 1858, Lincoln Papers; Herndon to Trumbull, June
Illinois Republicans and Leib and his Danite allies does not rule out the possibility that Republicans might have supported them and taken pleasure in whatever success the National Democrats might gain. In a letter written in late June, shortly after Douglas’s attack, Leib was described to President Buchanan by one of his operatives in Illinois as “an original and constant friend of yours” who had “discharged his duties faithfully.”

Leib’s usefulness to either the Buchanan administration or to Illinois Republicans was at an end following the senatorial campaign. An appointee of an administration whose followers were a small minority in Illinois, he had no political base of his own and could easily be considered expendable. And he was not at all likely to be publicly embraced by the Republicans, at least in the short run. In spring 1859 he had come to be at odds with Isaac Cook, the Chicago postmaster who had been his ally, and in futility he promoted Richard J. Hamilton to President Buchanan as a replacement for that post, apparently presuming to still have some credit in that quarter. But later in 1859 he must have lost whatever credit he had with Buchanan, as his overt partisan affiliation wobbled again; he became active in Illinois as a promoter of the Republican presidential candidacy of Simon Cameron, like Leib another former Democrat. He became known as Cameron’s “chief bugler in the West,” and he made local arrangements for Pennsylvania’s Cameron-favoring delegation at the Chicago Republican nominating convention. Presuming that Lincoln would be an ideal running mate for Cameron, Leib established a Cameron and Lincoln Club in Chicago. He is said to have pressed the case for such an alignment to Lincoln personally, claiming that the Republicans could not win the presidency in 1860 without the vote of his home state.

28. Leib to Trumbull, July 20, 1858, Trumbull Papers.
29. R. B. Carpenter to Buchanan, June 23, 1858, Illinois State Historical Library.
32. New York Herald, May 16, 1860; Andrew H. Reeder to Cameron, March 10, 1860, Simon Cameron Papers, Library of Congress. I am grateful to Professor Michael Burlingame for providing me with the Herald citation.
of Pennsylvania, with Cameron as the standard-bearer. Lincoln, he is supposed to have argued, was not so indispensable. After Lincoln’s nomination, Leib became a regular correspondent with the nominee, offering advice on such matters as the best means of appeasing the former Know-Nothings in Illinois. Leib thought that the Chicago Press and Tribune, in its effort to conciliate German-American voters, was too harsh on the Americans, who if alienated might be expected to be attracted to the candidacy of John Bell. However, “I am not the man to see the Press & Tribune people,” he added. Leib also counseled Lincoln on the electoral situation in Pennsylvania, where the Republican factions of Cameron and Andrew Curtin were in an uneasy rapprochement as Curtin contended for the governorship of that state. The outcome of Pennsylvania’s October election would be a bellwether for the national election the next month. Leib also forwarded to Lincoln an assessment of the crucial Pennsylvania situation from Cameron operative John P. Sanderson, who was city solicitor of Philadelphia and very close to that state’s shifting electoral circumstances.

But what is most arresting about Leib’s involvement in the 1860 campaign is his selection to edit the Rail Splitter, the Republican campaign sheet that was headquartered in Chicago and began publication in June. The Chicago Rail Splitter seems to have been intended to circulate in Chicago and the upper Midwest; a Cincinnati Rail Splitter also was in circulation at the same time. Leib had already had experience with such journals; witness his editorship of the Buchanan-favoring Democratic Bugle in Chicago in 1856. Obviously that record was not held against him in 1860, but how Leib was picked for such a relatively prestigious duty, who picked him, and indeed who financed the Rail Splitter are issues that remain mysterious. But it is apparent that unanimity did not exist over Leib’s selection among Lincoln’s Illinois supporters. Norman Judd was chairman of the Illinois State Republican Central Committee, a logical sponsor for The Rail Splitter, but Judd had reservations about Leib and the National Democrats in 1858. Judd’s reservations persisted in 1860, and they were shared by his Republican factional


34. Leib to Lincoln, June 6, 1860, Sanderson to Leib, August 13, 1860, Lincoln Papers.

35. Judd to Trumbull, June 25, 1860, Medill to Horace White, January 4, 1861, Me-
ally Charles H. Ray and Joseph Medill. Associated as they were with the Chicago Press and Tribune, Ray and Medill also identified Leib with Chicago Democrat editor John Wentworth, whom they despised. Judd, Ray, and Medill, along with Judd familiar Ebenezer Peck and Senator Trumbull (who had admittedly been in close touch with Leib in 1858), were Republican partisans with Democratic backgrounds who represented Chicago. If the Judd-Peck-Trumbull-Press and Tribune faction did not engage Leib, it seems likely that an aggregation of Illinois Republican factionalists led by former downstate Whigs David Davis and Leonard Swett, and including Secretary of State Ozias Hatch and State Auditor Jesse Dubois, and, anomalously, Chicago’s former Democrat Long John Wentworth was responsible. It is known that at the Republican National Convention at Chicago in May 1860, Davis and Swett had cautiously promised Pennsylvania delegates a seat for their state in Lincoln’s cabinet in return for a second-ballot vote for Lincoln, and they suggested that Cameron might well fill that seat. One can speculate that a promise of Rail Splitter editorship for Pennsylvanian Leib, who had acted as Cameron’s man in Illinois, could have been part of the quid pro quo. One can also speculate that Leib would have been less acceptable had he not been involved in the common struggle against Senator Douglas in 1858, indeed that some recognition of that service of his was also part of the equation.

The Rail Splitter was published weekly from June 23, 1860, until October 27, just before the election. It was well-written, composed, and printed, with a good bit of original editorial material and an impressive amount of local advertising. The cartoons were superior in concept and execution, though the paper’s content was for the most part unexceptional. It was essentially campaign boilerplate, even though it originated in the Rail Splitter’s own shop. It also carried accounts of Wide-Awake meetings in Chicago and elsewhere in Illinois and of Republican meetings around the state. It is tell-
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ing, perhaps, that on July 7 the Rail Splitter was identified by John Wentworth’s Chicago Democrat as “a capital campaign paper” edited in Leib’s “usual spirited and slashing style.” A little later it got a favorable notice from the Bloomington Pantagraph in David Davis’s hometown. The hostile Illinois State Register noted the appearance of the Rail Splitter as a Lincoln paper published in Chicago, “under Wentworth.”

In his first issue Leib admitted to working hard for James Buchanan in 1856, though saying nothing of laboring in Buchanan’s vineyard in 1858. He also admitted to have been mistaken in taking up Buchanan’s cause at all. Buchanan, he said, was “a willing tool of the slavery propagandists, who have put a collar around his neck…” Of Stephen A. Douglas, Leib wrote early in July, rather breathtakingly, that “He has been on all sides of every question; his sails have always been set to catch the popular breeze…” Indeed Douglas’s inconsistency was a persistent theme in the Rail-Splitter; Douglas was accused of turning his back on the Missouri Compromise after having defended it, and his followers were accused of being “all things to all men.”

Leib’s fullest statement of his own political orientation in 1860 was delivered in a full-page piece in the Rail Splitter on October 27; it was a transcript of a speech that he had delivered at Mauch Chunk, Pennsylvania, one month before. Obviously tailored for a local audience in Pennsylvania, the speech rendered a general indictment of the Democratic party and all its past and present major leaders—Buchanan, Douglas, and John C. Breckinridge. It attacked Douglas and the Kansas-Nebraska Act and claimed that Douglas “had bowed at the Southern shrine” by engineering the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. It rang the changes on Lincoln’s protectionist and free-labor stance, and as Leib commended Lincoln’s personal virtues and modest beginnings, he also asserted his own intimacy with Lincoln, claiming to know him well. Significantly, nothing in the speech could give offense or encouragement to either former Know-Nothings or foreign-born voters. The speech’s severe criticism of Douglas represents a commonality between Leib’s po-

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40. The Rail Splitter, June 23, 1860.
41. Ibid., July 1, 1860.
42. Ibid., July 7, July 21, August 18, 1860.
sitions in 1858 and 1860, the difference of course being that Leib claimed to be a Democrat the previous year and a Republican two years later.

The speech at Mauch Chunk seems to have been one of several that Leib delivered in Pennsylvania before that state’s October election, for Leib suddenly left the Rail Splitter in the hands of others after two months of editorship and went to his home state, ostensibly in behalf of the gubernatorial campaign of Andrew Curtin. There is no doubt that Lincoln was keenly interested in the Pennsylvania outcome, and Leib kept Lincoln apprised of his doings; shortly before the election Leib sent him an enormously detailed set of printed election returns from Pennsylvania with careful estimates of the 1860 outcome, all compiled by Simon Cameron’s lieutenant, John P. Sanderson. After the election, Leib once again pressed the case of Simon Cameron with Lincoln and David Davis, but this time, of course, in behalf of a cabinet assignment for Cameron.

If there was a further quid pro quo in recognition of Leib’s services to Lincoln and the Republican cause in 1860 and possibly in 1858, it must have been in Leib’s appointment as an army assistant quartermaster only a month after the firing on Fort Sumter. His appointment was rejected initially by the Senate, but its reconsideration was urged by President Lincoln in August 1861 in the only known surviving pronouncement about Leib to have been made by Lincoln. Leib then seems to have acted in an assistant quartermaster’s capacity in Western Virginia until April 1862, pending senatorial action a second time. When that action came, he was again rejected and relieved of duty, for this time he was charged with being short $1 million in his accounts. Instead of demanding an investigation into this allegation or any other sort of vindication, Leib moved to Cincinnati where later in 1862 he published a book.

That book, Nine Months in the Quartermaster’s Department, or The Chances for Making a Million, is well-printed and well-illustrated,
breezy, and of course self-serving, but also strikingly free of any expression of outrage on Leib’s part for his rectitude being impugned so publicly. Instead, Leib told of the recordkeeping difficulties under which he labored as a quartermaster, as when horses, wagons, and their cargo were seized without receipt by commanders during military operations, or when he was billed for materials not used. He also claimed to have drawn the rancor of both civil and military functionaries for failing to pay claims for which he had no funds and for refusing improperly completed requisitions. Quartermasters, he complained further, “occupy the pleasant position of being compelled, in many instances, to take the responsibility of acting without orders, while a refusal to do so would subject them to a charge of neglect of duty, and render them amendable to a court martial.”

Leib said of the charge that led to his dismissal “that it only provoked a smile of contempt” on his part, and though he claimed the support of a number of officers including General William Rosecrans, he suggested that honor prevented him from dignifying the charge with a formal response or with a request for renomination by President Lincoln. Instead, Charles Leib produced this book-length testimonial, and then he lit out for the territories.

Leib next appears in New Mexico early in 1863. He seems then to have been in the camp of former Illinoisian and then Kansan William F. M. Arny, who held a Lincoln appointment as territorial secretary. Arny was also acting governor of the territory, and soon to be its Indian superintendent. The Senate’s rejection of Leib’s appointment as a quartermaster had rendered totally unlikely the prospect of any other Republican patronage for him requiring senatorial approval. Yet somehow, probably through Arny’s influence, he had wangled a position as territorial superintendent of schools, and he had begun publication of yet another newspaper, the Santa Fe New Mexican. In that capacity he was able to do some of the territory’s official printing, and he was hopeful of obtaining a more lucrative contract to do federal printing. He remained in touch with Lincoln, lobbying him in behalf of Arny’s appointment as New Mexico Indian superintendent (an appointment that succeeded). He

47. Ibid., 186, 199. The quotation is on 186.
48. Charles Leib, Oath of Office as Territorial Superintendent of Schools for New Mexico, January 31, 1863, Charles Leib, Recipient of Territorial Treasury Warrants, February 14, March 7, 1863, W.F.M. Arny to Frederick Seward, February 23, 1863,
claimed that the incumbent Indian superintendent, who happened also to publish the rival *Santa Fe Gazette*, employed an editor who possessed Confederate sympathies, for which reason the incumbent ought to be removed. “You have done much for me for which I thank you heartily,” wrote Leib to Lincoln, “and I have nothing more to ask, but I do ask, and respectfully urge the appointment of Hon W.F.M. Arny, now Secretary of the Territory to that position.”

Yet even as he wrote this letter, Leib was looking beyond the confines of New Mexico, territorial journalism, and administration. He wrote a second letter to Lincoln the same day (the last he is known to have written to Lincoln), forwarding what were purported to be specimens of gold and silver ore from mines in Southern Arizona. And he asserted that General James Carleton, commanding in New Mexico and Arizona, had declared that Arizona’s gold fields “will prove to be richer than those of California.”

By early August Leib had retired from the *New Mexican*, selling out to Lincoln’s old Democratic friend from Illinois’ Eighth Judicial Circuit, Kirby Benedict, now a territorial judge. He parlayed his connection with General Carleton into an appointment as acting assistant surgeon at the army’s nearby Fort Union, and in October, at Carleton’s behest, he took on the duty of surgeon at the army’s new Fort Whipple, near Prescott, in newly established Arizona Territory. He then moved to that remote place, in that way finding his way to the hoped for Arizona El Dorado. His successor at the *New Mexican* expressed the hope that Leib would find there “a place and a people where his peculiar, impulsive and restless mind and temperament may find plenty of room for operation.”

But instead of finding such a location, Charles Leib ran out his string. On March 31, 1864, his contract as surgeon at Fort Whipple expired. In July he lost to Charles D. Poston of Tucson in a bid to be elected Arizona’s first delegate to Congress, carrying only the

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49. Leib to Lincoln, February 1, 1863, Lincoln Papers.

50. Leib to Lincoln, February 1, 1863 [second letter], Lincoln Papers.


52. Richard C. McCormick to John G. Nicolay, June 10, 1864, Lincoln Papers.

53. *Arizona Miner*, July 20, August 10, 1864, February 15, 1865; *Arizona Republican*, November 11, 1901; Biography Card, Charles Leib, Arizona Historical Society,
immediate vicinity of Prescott and losing elsewhere in the territory. The territorial secretary, who was hostile to him, claimed that Leib was trafficking on his connection with Lincoln and apparently trying in Arizona “to mend his broken fortunes.” And on January 21, 1865, he died intestate in Prescott, at the age of thirty-eight. His estate consisted of a small house, seven mining claims, and a Colt revolver Leib had claimed was given him by Abraham Lincoln. The total realized when the property in the estate was sold was fifty dollars.

The *Santa Fe Gazette*, the rival of Leib’s newspaper the *New Mexican*, crowed over Leib’s defeat in the Arizona election for territorial delegate, and called him a “montebank,” [sic] and an “impostor of the most arrant kind…” The *New Mexican* had shortly before referred to his “peculiar, impulsive and restless mind and temperament.” Both assessments obviously are different ways of implying the same thing: that Leib was inconsistent and restless to the point of being flighty or, with a different spin, that he was unscrupulous, cynical, and without principle—a scoundrel. It must be confessed that even after this investigation, the returns are still out. The nub of the issue here is Leib’s turning on Douglas after the latter’s attack on the Lecompton Constitution, thus aiding the Republicans while implicitly standing in favor of that constitution, and two years later editing a campaign sheet for the Republicans, who had had no use for the Lecompton Constitution. Nowhere does Leib explain himself. His activities in 1858 from a twenty-first century perspective seem self-defeating and feckless insofar as he might ever hope to gain position or income from the gratitude of the National Democrats, a minority in Illinois. He would be more likely to gain an advantage from Republicans, hence the title for this essay, admittedly with a question mark at its end.

Danite political activity in Illinois did make a difference in the 1858 election, though clearly not enough to make a difference for Lincoln; the combined Democratic popular vote in that election exceeded that of the Republicans by a margin of one thousand


54. *Santa Fe Gazette*, September 10, 1864; *Santa Fe New Mexican*, November 7, 1863.

55. This is the vote for state treasurer, one of two offices contested statewide that year.

56. See Herndon to Trumbull, June 24, 1858, Trumbull Papers.
or so, and Leib assuredly had a part in generating the National Democratic turnout that wiped out that advantage. Without that split, the Republicans would not have won two statewide offices. But thus far, evidence of actual contact between Leib and any Republican operatives as the Danite vote was being mobilized, is that of Leib approaching the Republicans; though Abraham Lincoln was said to be gratified and supportive of the activities of Danite John Dougherty, there is little sign of Republican encouragement or help to Leib during that time. Therefore, whatever Republican reciprocity there was for this work on Leib’s part, perhaps in his gaining the editorship of the Rail-Splitter, perhaps in his becoming an army assistant quartermaster, can at this point still only be surmised, however suggestive the evidence for it may be.