“Mechem” or “Mack”: How a One-Word Correction in the Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln Reveals the Truth about an 1856 Political Event

TOM M. GEORGE

In 1856 Abraham Lincoln made his only visit to Michigan, where he spoke at a campaign event on behalf of John Frémont, the first Republican presidential candidate. Though the text of Lincoln’s speech was discovered in 1930, why he made that unusual out-of-state appearance has never been clear. A one-word error, perpetuated in the transcription of a letter Lincoln wrote just prior to the visit, has until now, obscured his motives.

The Kalamazoo visit

Eighteen fifty-six was a politically tumultuous year. Two years earlier Anti-Nebraska forces from the Whig, Democratic, and various abolitionist parties had begun to “fuse” in northern states, forming Republican parties opposed to the possible spread of slavery. The Illinois fusion convention took place in May 1856, with Lincoln giving a keynote address.

In June 1856, the first Republican National Convention was held in Philadelphia. The convention chose John Frémont, the governor of California, as the Republican presidential candidate. Lincoln did not attend the convention but was nominated as Frémont’s running mate, finishing second behind William Dayton of New Jersey. Among the convention’s delegates was Hezekiah Wells of Kalamazoo, Michigan. Wells was a prominent Kalamazoo citizen who would later serve as president of the village of Kalamazoo. Upon his return home he helped to organize a Frémont campaign rally.

The rally took place August 27, 1856, in Kalamazoo’s Bronson Park. Speakers included such prominent Michigan Republicans as Gover-
nor Kinsley S. Bingham and future U. S. Senator Zachariah Chandler. Lincoln was the rally’s only out-of-state speaker. He had stayed in Chicago the night before and arrived by train that morning. He spent the night in Kalamazoo and returned to Illinois the next day.

Contemporary newspapers were mostly concerned with the size of the rally, the food preparations, and the accompanying parade. Lincoln is mentioned in the *Kalamazoo Gazette* as “the only foreign speaker in attendance.”¹ He is also mentioned in the diary of Henry Parker Smith, a farmer who attended the rally. Having listened to the various speakers, Smith recorded, “Lincoln is the man for me.”²

In the spring of 1930 a Lincoln enthusiast, Thomas Starr, discovered the text of Lincoln’s Kalamazoo speech when he found a copy of the *Detroit Daily Advertiser* that had fallen behind a shelf in the Detroit Public Library. The speech was reprinted in a monograph he published in 1941.³

The motivation for Lincoln’s visit to Kalamazoo has never been clear, and the speech itself offered no clues. In 1856 Michigan was of no particular political value to Lincoln. He had no relatives or acquaintances there. His law practice did not extend there.

Though Lincoln traveled extensively (almost constantly) within Illinois, he rarely traveled out of state. In the entire year of 1856, he left Illinois only once—for Kalamazoo. In fact, it was the only time he would leave Illinois in a nearly two-year period from September 1855 until July 1857. In 1855 his only out-of-state venture had been to Cincinnati, Ohio, to participate in a trial, and in 1857 he left Illinois only to visit Niagara Falls, New York, with Mrs. Lincoln.⁴

During the Frémont campaign Lincoln wrote letters declining

¹. Kalamazoo Gazette, August 29, 1856. The author thanks Jim Krone for help with correspondence; Margean Gladysz of the Kalamazoo Public Library for help in uncovering Alonzo Mack’s Kalamazoo past; Jorie Walters of the Kankakee County Museum; Paula Metzner of the Kalamazoo Valley Museum, Lynn Houghton and Sharon Carlson of the Western Michigan University Archives and Regional History Collections; and his wife Sandy for her companionship and help in transcribing the letter to Lincoln from James McDougall.

². Henry Parker Smith diary, August 27, 1856, Michigan Historical Collections, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

³. Thomas I. Starr, ed., *Lincoln’s Kalamazoo Address Against Extending Slavery, Also His Life by Joseph J. Lewis* (Detroit, Mich.: Fine Book Circle, 1941), 18–24. The highlight of this book is the inclusion of the Kalamazoo speech, which Starr had discovered. The book is 63 pages long. Between pages 12 and 13 is a copy of Lincoln’s August 21 letter to Wells.

invitations to speak at Burlington and Muscatine, Iowa, and at Tippecanoe, Indiana.\(^5\) Those cities were much closer than Kalamazoo to Springfield, Illinois, where Lincoln made his home.\(^6\) Burlington was just across the state line (the Mississippi River). The Burlington invitation had been extended by Iowa’s Republican governor, James Grimes. Lincoln explained his reasons for turning down the invitation, writing to Grimes, “First I can hardly spare the time. Secondly, I am superstitious. I have scarcely known a party, preceding an election, to call in help from the neighboring states, but they lost the state.”\(^7\)

So, why would Lincoln violate his own maxims and make an exceptional journey, requiring at least three days of travel by train, in the middle of a busy campaign season, to a community where he had no political, lawyerly, or familial connections? The answer lies in one of his own letters that was altered by an unknown hand.

The letters

Lincoln had written two letters to Kalamazoo’s Hezekiah Wells regarding the visit. Like all of Lincoln’s known work, those letters were transcribed for The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, edited by Roy P. Basler and others, with the first volumes appearing in 1953.

In the first letter, written August 4, 1856, Lincoln responds to an invitation from Wells to speak in Kalamazoo.\(^8\) (Wells’s letter to Lincoln has never been found.) Basler’s transcription, which includes two footnotes (only one is used here), reads,

```
Dr. Sir
Aug. 4. 1856

Yours of July 24th. inviting me to be present at a Fremont mass meeting, to be held on the 27th. of August, at Kalamazoo, has been forwarded to me by Mr. Mechem\(^1\) of Kankakee. It would afford me great pleasure to be with you, and I will do so if possible; but I can not promise positively.

We are having trouble here that needs the attention of all of us. I mean the Fillmore movement. With the Fremont and Fillmore men united, here in Illinois, we have Mr. Buchanan in the hollow of our hand; but
```


\(^6\) Distances from Springfield as calculated by Mapquest (www.mapquest.com): to Burlington, Iowa, 132 miles; to Muscatine, Iowa, 170 miles; to Tippecanoe, Indiana, 263 miles; to Kalamazoo, Michigan, 319 miles.

\(^7\) Lincoln to James Grimes, July 12, 1856, Collected Works, 2:348.

\(^8\) Lincoln to Hezekiah G. Wells, August 4, 1856, ibid., 2:358.
with us divided, as we now are, he has us. This is the short and simple truth, as I believe. Very Respectfully

A. LINCOLN

1Lincoln’s spelling of this name may have been “Machin,” The two “e’s” have been written in over Lincoln’s letters by another hand. Neither name has led to an identification of the person involved.

In his second letter to Wells, Lincoln confirms that he will attend the rally:

Dear Sir: Augt. 21. 1856
At last I am able to say, no accident preventing, I will be with you on the 27th. I suppose I can reach in time, leaving Chicago the same morning. I shall go to the Matteson House, Chicago, on the evening of the 26th.
Yours truly A. LINCOLN

The letters seem plain enough, but neither serves to explain why Lincoln would deviate from his established bias against campaigning in a neighboring state. Basler’s footnote draws attention to Mr. Mechem of Kankakee, and just as in 1953, under either spelling, he still fails to appear in any public records.

The preeminence of The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln has led to the perpetuation of Basler’s “Mechem” transcription. For example, Joel Orosz, in the 1978 article “Lincoln Comes to Kalamazoo,” published in the Historical Society of Michigan’s Chronicle, repeats Basler’s “Mechem” interpretation.10

The original August 4 letter still exists. It is the property of the Kalamazoo Valley Museum. The letter remains in good condition, though it has been creased from folding. It is written on congressional stationery, apparently left over from Lincoln’s single term in Congress (Figure 1).

A cursory examination of the letter shows that the word tentatively interpreted by Basler as “Mechem” is ambiguous. Basler has acknowledged the difficulty in his footnote. In fact, on closer scrutiny, it can be seen that the word was originally a shorter name to which the letters “em” were added with another instrument, by a writer who was not Lincoln. The addition unnaturally fills the space between the name and the subsequent word, “of.” A comma, clearly visible between the original, underlying word and “of” indicates the intended spacing (Figure 2).

Figure 1. The August 4, 1856, letter from Abraham Lincoln to Hezekiah Wells is preserved at the Kalamazoo Valley Museum in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Figure 2. A close-up of the letter clearly shows the altering of the name “Mack” to “Mechem,” although who made the alteration and why is unknown.
If the letters “em” are removed from the end of “Mechem,” the “h” is seen to be a Lincoln “k,” and the first “e,” which also has been overwritten by the interloper, is seen to be an “a.” The proper transcription of the text, then, is “Mr. Mack, of Kankakee.”

Why someone would make extraneous marks over Lincoln’s script remains a mystery. Whether it was a purposeful effort to obscure Mack’s identity or simply random doodling will probably never be known. The identification of Mack, however, as the intermediary between Wells and Lincoln, brings new insight into the motivation behind Lincoln’s trip.

Alonzo Mack (1822–1871)

Unlike the fictitious Mr. Mechem, Alonzo Mack of Kankakee has left an extensive record of legislative and community involvement. His name is found in vital records, census records, and military documents. Prior to settling in Kankakee, he lived in the Kalamazoo, Michigan, area. After moving to Kankakee, Mack became active in the fusion movement and served as a delegate to the 1856 Republican National Convention, as did Wells. Mack is mentioned in other correspondence both to and from Lincoln.

Though direct correspondence between Mack and Wells has not been found, Mack is undoubtedly the intermediary who helped facilitate Lincoln’s only visit to Michigan. Mack also provides the reason Lincoln journeyed to Michigan.

According to his obituaries, Alonzo Mack was born in Moretown, Vermont, in 1822, and “while a lad, penetrated the extreme verge of civilization, finally settling in Kalamazoo County, Mich., where he acquired the science and afterward began the practice of medicine.”

After leaving for a while to further his studies, “he went to Schoolcraft, Mich. (about 10 miles south of Kalamazoo), and very soon thereafter he returned to Kalamazoo County. . . . He remained there for about thirteen years, and then removed with his family to Kankakee.”

Mack would have been a contemporary of Wells while living in Schoolcraft. Records show him serving as Schoolcraft township clerk in 1847, just after Wells had served as township supervisor. On August 9, 1849, Mack married Mary Ann Willard in nearby Van Buren.

13. History of Kalamazoo County, Michigan. With Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of its Prominent Men and Pioneers (Philadelphia: Everts & Abbott, 1880), 514; Wells was treasurer 1842–43 and supervisor 1844–45, and Mack was clerk in 1847.
County. The 1880 History of Kalamazoo County lists a “Dr. Mack” as an early area physician who left for Kankakee, “became wealthy and politically prominent in the State, and died there.”

After settling in Kankakee, census records show Mack’s occupation changing to banker and then to lawyer. Like Wells, Mack became an early Republican activist and was involved in civic affairs. He served as president of the village of Kankakee in 1856. He subsequently served several terms in the Illinois statehouse and Senate. In 1862 he assisted in organizing the Seventy-sixth Illinois Volunteer Regiment, for which he was commissioned a colonel. Early in 1863 he resigned his military commission in order to return to the Illinois Senate.

After the war he moved to Chicago where he practiced law and was
involved in the establishment of a newspaper, the *Chicago Republican*. He died in Chicago in 1871 and is buried in Limestone Township Cemetery near Kankakee.19

There are numerous primary sources documenting Mack’s activities. Correspondence to and from Lincoln after 1856 discusses Mack’s interest in an appointment as Illinois state treasurer, his seeking a contract to supply military provisions, and his need to resign his military commission in order to return to the state Senate.20

**The 1854 Senate race**

To understand why Mack becomes important to Lincoln we must look back at the 1854 Senate race. In 1854 Lincoln had been a candidate for the U.S. Senate. Prior to the Seventeenth Amendment, members of the U.S. Senate were chosen by state legislatures. Following the legislative elections in November 1854, Lincoln began a serious campaign focused on the newly elected members of the legislature. He wrote directly to members with whom he had a personal relationship and asked for their help.21 In other cases he wrote acquaintances and


20. In a letter to Lincoln, James Miller, the state treasurer, relates his concerns over executing a state bond matter. “Dr. Mack” is mentioned as one of the parties involved. James Miller to Lincoln, July 28, 1859, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Miller later reports his plan for “Dr. Mack” to take his place as state treasurer and seeks Lincoln’s council on the matter. (Miller resigned as treasurer August 27.) James Miller to Lincoln, August 20, 1859, Abraham Lincoln Papers. Ward Hill Lamon writes to Lincoln on the possible resignation of Miller as state treasurer. Lamon reports Mack’s interest in the position but recommends instead appointing someone who is not a banker. Lamon to Lincoln, August 20, 1859, Abraham Lincoln Papers. Lincoln writes to George McClellan on behalf of Mack and T. A. Marshall, both Illinois state senators who are seeking a contract to supply provisions to the army. (The contract was not awarded.) A facsimile of the letter shows how Lincoln wrote “A. W. Mack.” Lincoln to Gen. George B. McClellan, June, 10, 1861, *Collected Works*, 4:400. Lincoln writes to Edwin Stanton regarding a leave of absence for Mack. This is a one-sentence letter: “I would be glad for the leave of absence to be granted if it can be consistently done.” Lincoln is referring to Mack’s resignation as colonel of the 76th Illinois Regiment. Mack would resign January 7, 1863. Lincoln to Edwin M. Stanton, December 5, 1862, *Collected Works*, 5:541. Governor Yates of Illinois writes Lincoln, encouraging him to accept Mack’s resignation as colonel so he could return to take his seat in the state senate. “Please set aside the rule in this case of Extreme emergency & accept Mack’s resignation. He will be thrown out if this is not done, He can be reappointed after the Session.” Richard Yates to Lincoln, January 6, 1863, Abraham Lincoln Papers.

asked them to intercede on his behalf with legislators whom he did not know.\textsuperscript{22}

He compiled lists of the members of the legislature and attempted to predict their vote based on party affiliation. With 25 senators and 75 representatives, 51 votes were normally required to win. A vacancy in the House reduced that number to 50. He calculated that there was a total of 41 Democrats, 37 Whigs, 19 Anti-Nebraska Democrats, 1 Nebraska Whig, 1 abolitionist, and 1 vacancy.\textsuperscript{23}

He reasoned that, if the Whigs and Anti-Nebraska Democrats worked together, they could elect an anti-Nebraska senator. In order to win the election, Lincoln needed to secure the votes of all his fellow Whigs and thirteen of the Anti-Nebraska Democrats. This was a challenge because the Anti-Nebraska Democrats would be inclined to prefer one of their own over a Whig. Lincoln worked to try to win them over. He was aided by three Whig congressmen—Jesse Olds Norton, Elihu B. Washburne, and Richard Yates—in rounding up the support of the state legislators within their districts. Lincoln’s allies reported their progress to him with frequent correspondence. Particular attention was paid to anti-Nebraska Democrats in Northern Illinois and the single Whig representative, John Strunk of Kankakee.

The Strunk factor

On December 8 Lincoln confidant David Davis wrote that he thought Leonard Swett could help with Strunk and the Anti-Nebraska Democrat representative from Will County, G. D. A. Parks. He reported that Swett had “talked with Strunk about you before the election—Strunk was very favorable.”\textsuperscript{24}

Lincoln received a letter, written December 11, from James F. McDougall, who agreed to answer Lincoln’s “interrogatories” and reported that Strunk “is a man of strong prejudices and violent and choleric nature.” McDougall reported that among neighbors Strunk was known as “Honest John” and added “should think you had better write him.”\textsuperscript{25} Jesse Olds Norton sent Lincoln Strunk’s address and

\textsuperscript{22} Lincoln to Charles Hoyt, November 10, 1854, ibid., 2:286; Lincoln to Jacob Harding, November 11, 1854, ibid.; Lincoln to Hugh LeMaster, November 29, 1854, ibid., 2:289; and Lincoln to Herbert W. Fay, December 11, 1854, ibid., 2:292.

\textsuperscript{23} A List of Members Composing the Nineteenth General Assembly of the State of Illinois (Springfield: Elam Rust, 1855), Broadside Collection, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, Ill.

\textsuperscript{24} David Davis to Lincoln, December 8, 1854, Abraham Lincoln Papers.

\textsuperscript{25} James F. McDougall to Lincoln, December 11, 1854, ibid.
advised, “I think you had better write him a kind letter.” Norton reported that he had spoken to Strunk’s neighbor, who had assured him that “Strunk would be all right.” Norton further said he would write Strunk himself, and later reported back that he had.26

Leonard Swett sent two letters to Lincoln reporting favorably on his meetings with Strunk and Parks, and advising Lincoln to write Strunk.27 Davis wrote Lincoln the day after Christmas saying that “Swett has done good” and “burn this letter.”28

Having received the favorable reports from Swett, Norton, and Davis, on January 6, Lincoln sounding optimistic, sent Congressman Washburne a summary of the campaign and asked him to thank Norton for obtaining the support of representatives Strunk of Kankakee and Wheeler of nearby Kendall.29

As the legislature began organizational meetings to choose its leadership, there were signs that Lincoln’s support was weaker than he had estimated. One Anti-Nebraska Democrat did not show up, and on January 14 Lincoln wrote to Congressman Yates reporting that he had lost the support of another Anti-Nebraska Democrat, state senator Uri Osgood, who represented Joliet and Kankakee.30 The districts represented by Strunk and Parks lay within Osgood’s Senate district.

On February 8 the election was held in a special joint session of the legislature. Fifteen candidates received votes, and ten ballots ultimately were needed to decide the contest. Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln observed the proceedings from the House gallery. Lincoln had the most votes (45) on the first ballot, but as the voting progressed, some of his Anti-Nebraska Democrat supporters left him in favor of Anti-Nebraska Democratic candidate Lyman Trumbull. Lincoln continued to slowly lose ground on subsequent ballots. On the seventh ballot, the pro-Nebraska Democrats switched their votes from the incumbent, James Shields, to a stealth candidate, Illinois governor Joel Matteson, a Democrat. They were joined by Kankakee Whig John Strunk. By the ninth ballot Matteson was at 47 votes and on the verge of victory. In order to prevent Matteson from winning, on the tenth ballot Lincoln asked the Whigs to shift their support to Trumbull. With the exception of Strunk, all the Whigs followed

28. David Davis to Lincoln, December 26, 1854, ibid.
Lincoln’s instructions. Trumbull was then announced the winner with 51 votes.31

“Old Man” Strunk

The day after the election, Lincoln analyzed his loss in a letter to Washburne. He wrote, “It was Govr. Matteson’s work. He has been secretly a candidate.” Lincoln specifically singled out the role played by Representative Strunk: “One notable instance of this sort was with Mr. Strunk of Kankakee. At the beginning of the session he came a volunteer to tell me he was for me & would walk a hundred miles to elect me; but lo, it was not long before he leaked it out that he was going for me the first few ballots & then for Govr. Matteson.”32

Lincoln noted Strunk’s role again in a postmortem he sent to Norton. He complained that Governor Matteson “made his first successful hit by tampering with Old man Strunk. Strunk was pledged to me, which Matteson knew, but he succeeded in persuading him that I stood no chance of an election, and in getting a pledge from him to go for him as second choice.”33

A canal problem

To Washburne, Lincoln noted Governor Matteson’s influence with “members round about the canal.” He was referring to legislators whose districts were near the Illinois & Michigan Canal. (This would include those from the counties of Cook, Will, LaSalle, Kendall, Grundy, and Kankakee.) Canal politics had been an ongoing feature in Illinois for two decades. Horace White, who had met Lincoln in 1854, recounted in a 1908 address to the Illinois State Historical Society that Matteson “had been able to recruit a small third party composed of members from the vicinity of the Illinois and Michigan Canal who were devoted to his personal interests.”34

Both Lincoln and Matteson had an extensive history with the canal.

Lincoln had been a supportive member of the state legislature during the canal’s inception. In 1852 he had been appointed to serve as one of three commissioners on the Canal Claims Commission. The commission had been created by the legislature to hear claims for damages being made against the state by aggrieved citizens and contractors related to the construction of the canal and its consequences.35

Not all the claimants were satisfied, however. After Lincoln submitted the commission’s report, Uri Osgood, the state senator from Joliet, introduced legislation requiring the state to pay damages to mill owners who had lost water power as the canal opened and diverted flow from the Des Plaines River. In February 1853 Osgood’s bill passed the Senate. The canal board then hired Lincoln, who appeared on the board’s behalf to testify against the bill in a House hearing. The bill subsequently died when the House failed to take any action on it.36

Matteson had an equally long and colorful history with the canal. After moving to Illinois, he had worked as a contractor on its construction. Prior to running for governor, he had served in the state senate representing the Joliet area. As governor, he appointed the one canal trustee and approved the move of the trustee office from Chicago to Joliet. Later (1859) it was discovered that he had fraudulently redeemed, while governor, scrip the state had issued to pay for canal work. After the senate election, there were unproven allegations that he had attempted to buy votes.37

Canal politics were apparently still alive and well, because despite the predominance of anti-Nebraska sentiment among northern legislators, Lincoln could not hold the support of those from the canal area. Uri Osgood, who was an Anti-Nebraska Democrat according to Lincoln’s own analysis, did not support Lincoln in any of the ten ballots. And John Strunk, who owned a mill in Kankakee, was the only Whig to vote for Matteson. Representatives Day and Strawn of LaSalle County, both Anti-Nebraska Democrats, left Lincoln to support Trumbull after the first ballot.38

Lincoln had lost a very close race; in his analysis he noted that on one ballot or another 47 different legislators had supported him.39

35. Wayne Temple, Lincoln’s Connections with the Illinois & Michigan Canal, His Return from Congress in ’48 and His Invention (Springfield, Ill.: Illinois Bell, 1986).
38. Journals of the House and Senate, 1855.
Had he been able to cultivate three more votes and solidify some of his other commitments, he would have won the election. Many of Lincoln’s subsequent actions can be seen in the context of positioning himself to run again for the Senate.

After his problems with Kankakee area legislators, Alonzo Mack would seem a natural ally. Having the support of the next legislator from Kankakee, should there be another senate contest, could make the path a lot easier.

Looking ahead

In 1856 the immediate concern was the Frémont campaign, but Lincoln was undoubtedly preparing for the 1858 Senate race as well. Though Lincoln was discreet in his approach to a contest that was still more than two years off, others were not. As early as February 1856, when he was introduced by Richard Oglesby (future Illinois governor and U.S. senator) for a speech he was to give in Decatur, he was referred to as “our next candidate for the U.S. Senate.”

The Bloomington fusion convention in May 1856 was an opportunity to establish a network of activists and to cultivate new political talent. County conventions had been held to elect delegates to the Bloomington meeting, and Alonzo Mack, the new president of the village of Kankakee, attended in this capacity. Lincoln served on the nominating committee as the convention chose thirty-four delegates for the upcoming Republican National Convention in Philadelphia, including Mack. In the roster of delegates he is listed as “A.W. Mack, of Kankakee.”

It is almost certain that at some point during the proceedings of the Philadelphia convention, Mack would have run into his acquaintance from his days in the Kalamazoo area, Hezekiah Wells. With Lincoln having been nominated as the vice-presidential candidate by another Illinois delegate, William B. Archer, of Aurora, Mack may have even visited the Michigan delegation in an effort to win Lincoln support. Perhaps Wells was one of the five Michigan delegates who voted for Lincoln. On July 27, or roughly a month after the convention, Wells sent his Kalamazoo invitation to Lincoln via Mack.


Lincoln’s acceptance of Wells’s invitation conveyed through Mack, while declining others, illustrates the intricacies of a nineteenth-century political strategy dependent on forming political alliances. With the Senate campaign of 1858 next on the horizon, Lincoln was planning ahead.

John Strunk, whom McDougall reported as having a “violent choleric nature,” died of cholera in July 1855. Mack, who had been elected president of the village of Kankakee in April 1856 and was now an ardent Republican, was an up-and-comer. Being a transplant from Kalamazoo, he was untainted by canal politics. From Lincoln’s point of view, Mack would be a great improvement over Kankakee’s Representative Strunk or Joliet’s Senator Osgood. Lincoln may have felt he could not decline the request of a needed political ally.

Lincoln of course would run for the U.S. Senate in 1858. Unlike the 1854 campaign, in 1858, reflecting his efforts, county Republican conventions would choose Lincoln as their putative Senate candidate prior to the general election, thus allowing him to debate Douglas as his legitimate Republican opponent.

Despite Alonzo Mack’s election to the Illinois legislature in 1858, Republicans would fail to capture a majority of the seats. Consequently, Stephen Douglas would be reelected as U. S. senator when the new Illinois legislature convened.

Conclusion

Lincoln’s 1856 visit to Kalamazoo was not a random event but rather part of an overall strategy of building a base of political support for future endeavors. His trip to Kalamazoo is the product of internal Illinois politics related to the Illinois & Michigan Canal and Lincoln’s quest for the Senate.

Changing a single word in a letter Lincoln wrote more than one hundred and fifty years ago creates a “butterfly effect,” leading to a larger understanding of Lincoln’s two U.S. Senate races.

42. Portrait and Biographical Record of Kankakee County, Illinois (Chicago: Lake City Publishing, 1898), 602. The entry for William Strunk includes biographical information about his parents, John and Martha Strunk.