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Abraham Lincoln's Advice to Lawyers – I

Lead: Few Americans have excited the nation's admiration and respect as Abraham Lincoln. He also could be a very practical man.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Almost from the beginning of his career as a prairie lawyer, Abraham Lincoln was a success. Born in Kentucky in 1809, he migrated with his family to Indiana and then to Illinois. His self-education is the stuff of legend and he played with various occupations until settling

on the practice of law. In 1836 he was sufficiently prepared to pass the bar and began his practice, first in New Salem then Springfield. He worked hard, followed the judges on their circuits, and soon was making a handy living. More than the judges, more than the Governor of the state.

He could tell a great story. After the Black Hawk War of 1832, he joked that he never saw any "live fighting Indians, but he had "a good many struggles with the mosquitoes." Lincoln had absorbed the flinty pragmatism of his grim frontier upbringing, had good instincts about people, liked them and they liked him back. For instance, tall, gangly, awkward in his appearance, he knew

he was no beauty, but he also knew that he shared that defect with the vast majority of jurors and later voters. A little self-deprecating remark, a funny story usually told over and over again so that people knew the punch line, a clever turn of phrase, a quote from Shakespeare, and he had them. Yet, most of that buffoonery was just contrived. Lincoln was as smart as a whip. Shrewd, with a healthy dose of common sense, Abraham Lincoln could see to the heart of a case and usually won it.

There is within the Lincoln archives a fascinating documentary fragment that gives more than a clue to his native intelligence and tough-mindedness. Notes, written in his clear

hand, of a law lecture given in the summer of 1850 to what seems to be a group of young law students have survived. Next time: Lincoln's advice to young lawyers.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

Lincoln, Abraham. *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*. Roy Basler, ed. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953, 1988).

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