



Detail by
CLINTON PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH AND LINCOLN
HERITAGE OF
DEWITT COUNTY

LINCOLN'S HAT

A PROPER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

was under construction in the summer of 1859.



Photo courtesy of DeWitt Presbyterian Church

Lincoln attended a fundraising event at the first Clinton Presbyterian Church, then located at the northwest corner of Madison and Washington Streets. The beam on which Lincoln placed his hat on that fateful day in 1859 was utilized in the construction of the current church building, as was the original corner cap at this entrance.

A floor was laid, walls, roof, and belfry nearly completed, when "a ball due to lack of funds" occurred. In October 1859, money was urgently needed to complete construction. The view from the building site to the DeWitt County Courthouse on the public square was unobstructed. Recognizing opportunity, the church ladies held a festival during court week to take maximum advantage of the generosity of visitors in town on legal business. Lincoln, wearing his stovepipe hat, was among those in attendance. Two church ladies, Mrs. Elizabeth Kent and Miss Roberts, greeted him at the entrance—for there was no door—and politely offered to take Lincoln's hat. Lincoln declined the offer, stating he had some important papers in it. Instead of handing the hat over, Lincoln placed it high on an unframed beam, safely out of reach of others. According to local lore, Lincoln contributed to the fundraising efforts by purchasing a bouquet of violets from a little girl who accepted five dollars for the nosegay.

LINCOLN'S HAT IS AN

historical icon. At the Presbyterian Church event in October 1859, Lincoln was cautious about letting his hat out of his sight. There was one instance, however, when Lincoln was not so hesitant to part with it. In August 1864, Lincoln confided the following to his good friend, Ward Hill Lamon, with whom he spent many evenings in DeWitt County during their days on the Eighth Judicial Circuit: "I came to the Soldiers' Home alone, riding Old Abe . . . jugging along at a slow gait.



Photo by Abraham Lincoln, Photo by Oliver and Moore

insect in my thigh . . . when suddenly I was around . . . by the report of a rifle." The shot caused Lincoln's horse to start, and, in Lincoln's words, "with one motion I found he unceremoniously separated me from my eight-dollar plug hat." A wallo: on guard they heard the shot. Upon investigation, he and a companion found Lincoln's bullet-holed hat. Pictures are President Lincoln and Lamon, both wearing plug hats.



Copyright © 2010 DeWitt County Historical Society. All rights reserved.