

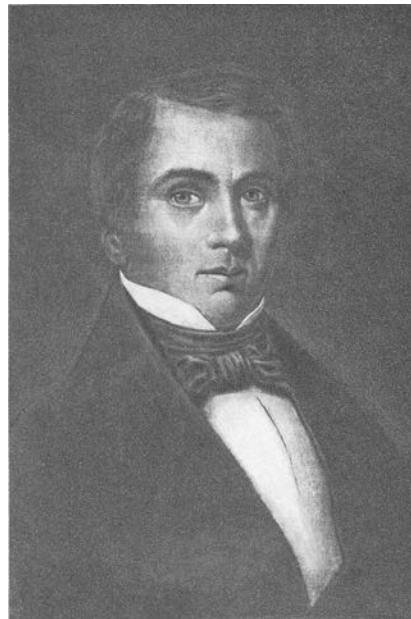
Lyman Trumbull and Gustave Koerner: Allies for Freedom

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Illinois Senator Lyman Trumbull, a lawyer who crafted the Thirteenth Amendment banning slavery and other key civil rights legislation during the Civil War, honed his legal and political skills while living in Belleville, Illinois, from 1837 to 1849. During that period he also would create relationships with Gustave Koerner and James Shields that would last the rest of his life. The three men would also have an impact on the career of Abraham Lincoln.

Trumbull was born in 1813, in Colchester, Connecticut, taught school in Greenville, South Carolina, for three years and then read law under the tutelage of a Georgia judge. He came to Belleville in 1837, with letters of introduction to present to Democrat Congressman Adam Snyder, who had a law office in the northwest corner of the Belleville Public Square. (1) Snyder, apparently, was not looking for an addition to his firm as he had already partnered with Gustave Koerner and James Shields. The careers of Trumbull, Koerner and Shields would intersect in court and politics for the next several decades.

Trumbull “became associated in law practice with former Governor John Reynolds. Reynolds was the most distinguished citizen of Belleville and of Illinois. He was a former Illinois Supreme Court Judge, assemblyman, governor and a member of the U.S. House of Representatives”. (2) Reynolds decision to take on Trumbull was a “recognition of the young man’s unusual ability “ that caused Reynolds “to entrust his law business to an unknown twenty-four year old lawyer. His trust was well rewarded.”(3)



Gustave Koerner, 1830's family painting

Koerner became friends with Trumbull as they rode the second judicial circuit which covered St. Clair, Monroe, Randolph, Washington, Clinton, Bond, Fayette and Montgomery counties. Lawyers and the judge traveled three months in the spring and fall. Koerner described Trumbull's appearance: "He was tall, well proportioned, with a slight stoop, probably owing to his great short sightedness and his rather light hair and blue eyes. His features were regular and handsome...his smile was sneeringly sardonic."(4) Koerner also credited Trumbull's success to his focus. "He was not an orator but was an excellent and logical debater and prepared his cases with extreme care...His manner with people was reserved, almost cold...His aim was to become a great lawyer and to play a conspicuous part in politics. To everything else he seemed indifferent."(5)

Riding the circuit was difficult. "They traveled by buggy or horseback over rutted roads which had no gravel and no fences. When rains would come, the mud would be knee deep. Since the taverns and inns on the road were often miserable hovels, there was little rest for the weary travelers.(6)

Koerner's *Memoirs* described a thirty five mile trip to Kaskaskia in the winter of 1836, just as a snow storm started to fall. He was accompanied by State's Attorney Walter Scates and Judge Sidney Breese.

"Several times we nearly mired in the sloughs
and mud holes. Late in the night we arrived
at Kaskaskia, stopping at the only very poor
tavern in the place, and all three had to sleep
the first night in the same bed, spoon like.
Next morning it turned cold, and the courthouse
was a mere barn, without fireplaces and with some
of the window panes broken. Judge Breese
sat on the bench in his great coat with a silk
handkerchief tied around his head. It was a
dreadful time we spent there."(7)

But, for an aspiring politician, the travel had some benefits after court was adjourned for the day. Court days brought people to town and "Lawyers would address crowds on political issues, so it was natural for these lawyers to turn to politics. (8)



Lyman Trumbull, photo Library of Congress

Trumbull found the social life acceptable in Belleville. In an 1837 letter to his father, Lyman wrote "balls and cotillions are frequent in Belleville" and that he attended one, but did not dance. It was the first time he had attended a social gathering since he left home in 1833.(9) "There are more girls here than I was aware of. At the private party I attended, there were about 15, all residing in town. If I can make a living at law I shall like it here very much."(10)

James Shields, also a bachelor and resident of the Belleville House hotel on the public square, and his friend, Charley Mount, shared the social swirl with Trumbull. "A mutual attraction at once drew the lawyer (Shields) and Mount together in bonds of warm friendship. In a brief space of time they both enjoyed immense popularity, particularly in the younger stratum of Belleville society; were much admired by the young ladies, and became conspicuous figures in all their dancing parties and other social gatherings."(11) Shields was elected to the legislature in 1836 to represent the Randolph county area .

The Democratic party in St. Clair and Madison counties was split into two hostile factions. One faction was led by John Reynolds and Lyman Trumbull, and the other, which was allied with Governor Thomas Ford, had Shields, Koerner and William Bissell among its leaders. (12)

In an 1838 newspaper item Trumbull accused former Lieutenant Governor William A. Kinney of Belleville with malfeasance in office while serving as Commissioner of Internal Improvements, a charge which brought a challenge to duel from Kinney's son, William C. Kinney. "The duel was stopped by James Shields, Kinney's second, who refused to participate in murder.' Later, an investigation disclosed that defalcations were made by a clerk in the commissioner's office, which cleared the elder Kinney.(13) Trumbull and Shields would be at odds personally and politically for the next twenty years.

The lawyers participated in civic duties as well. Koerner, Trumbull and Shields were listed as Engine Men for the Belleville Fire Company when the fire company's by-laws were published in 1841.(14) Trumbull, trying to add to his lawyer's income, invested in building lots in Belleville, buying several in the 1840's at sheriff sales.

Trumbull left Reynolds' office to practice with his brother, George. Lyman, running as a Democrat,

was elected to the Illinois House of Representatives in 1840 after an exhausting canvass. "Trumbull and I made speeches in every precinct and organized clubs in every little town," recalled Koerner.(15) Koerner spoke in German to immigrants, helping Trumbull win his first contest. At twenty- seven, Trumbull was the youngest member of the state legislature and found himself in the company of Abraham Lincoln, Sidney Breese and Shields.(16)

He also found himself in the company of the fairer sex. "It had all begun when Trumbull joined a Springfield literary organization...at his first meeting he met Julia Jayne, daughter of Springfield's earliest physician. Julia was lithe, tall, dark-haired and blue-eyed. She was seventeen".(17)

Trumbull fought for legislation requiring the state, which was undergoing a financial crisis, to pay its debts and for a bill regulating banks. (18) The governor was impressed with the freshman legislator's performance and named him Secretary of State when Stephen A. Douglas resigned to take a seat on the state supreme court. (19) However, the pay was low and the workload minimal, so Lyman had "time to continue his law practice in Belleville where, with his brother George, he built an office building on the public square at the cost of \$500."(20) Trumbull, a stubborn and independent thinker, argued with newly-elected Governor Thomas Ford over Ford's plan to repay the state debt ,and Ford removed him from office in 1843. This setback did not deter Lyman from marrying Julia in June of that year. She became pregnant and stayed with her Springfield family until her son was born. "In July, 1844, Lyman took his wife and son and two servant girls to Belleville. They rented a house, which Trumbull furnished with household goods purchased in St. Louis."(21) Alvin Nebelsick, author of *History of Belleville*, states Trumbull lived on South High Street, in a rented home. Lyman and his brother George bought two lots in the middle of the 200 block of South High Street, but it is believed Lyman never built a home in Belleville.

Shields was appointed State Auditor through the influence of Stephen A. Douglas. Trumbull fought with Shields over solving the state's financial problems.

Shields service as a legislator and State Auditor identified him as a rising star. Adam Snyder, son of Shields' law partner, said Shields was "raw boned, straight and soldier-like with ruddy complexion and dark hair, his face and manners were singularly pleasing and ingratiating. Large-hearted and generous to a fault, he was idiotic in all details of business and finance, and but for a pension would have died in abject poverty."(22) Koerner wrote in his *Memoirs* that Shields was "vain and egotistical... I knew all his weaknesses and his vanity amused me." He went on to describe Shields: "Shields was of medium height, very broad shouldered and with rather long arms. His complexion was fair and healthy, his eyes gray and very sparkling. In a passion they seemed to shoot fire."(23)

Those eyes turned fiery after Shields read three columns printed in a Springfield newspaper; it greatly angered Shields and he was prepared to shoot, as in a duel. Abraham Lincoln admitted to writing "Shields is a fool as well as a liar, with him truth is out of the question."(24) Lincoln, Mary Todd, his future wife, and Julia Jayne, Trumbull's future spouse, also chided the bachelor Shields for his vanity

which was displayed at Springfield gatherings. The column continued "It is also said that he was seen frittering away state money at a gathering of fast women, and quoted him purportedly saying 'Dear girls it is distressing but I cannot marry you all...it is not my fault that I am so handsome and so interesting.' (25) None of it was true and Shields felt honor bound to challenge Lincoln. Democrat Shields was especially wounded by Lincoln's words since he had crossed the legislative aisle to co-sponsor legislation with Lincoln, a Whig, in the Illinois House of Representatives. Lincoln's language in this instance is uncharacteristic of his historic image as a fair and honorable man.

After a series of notes were exchanged between Shields and Lincoln, Bloody Island on the west bank of the Mississippi river at Alton was chosen as the duel site. Lincoln chose three and a half feet long cavalry broadswords as the weapons, with the stipulation the combatants were to stand within a box while they flailed away at each other. The contest, while serious, was taking on the appearance of a sham because Lincoln's conditions greatly favored his success.

The two men and their seconds met on Bloody Island. While the seconds talked to find a way out of the confrontation, Shields and Lincoln warmed up with the cumbersome weapons. Finally, two more men arrived, both friends of Shields and Lincoln, and persuaded them to give up their arms. The party returned by boat to Alton with Shields and Lincoln speaking amicably.

In a letter to the editor of *Century Magazine* in April, 1877, Koerner, who was familiar with the "code duelo" as a German university student in the 1830's, attempted to set the record straight. He defended Shields actions.

"No man of the least spirit could have taken those insults without satisfaction even by arms, if necessary...He was a young man who had his reputation for honesty at stake; and to have his personal features and peculiar habits ridiculed in a small but select society in which he daily moved was more than even a saint could have borne."

The letter castigated Lincoln's seconds, his friends who presented the terms for the duel, for not knowing the proper terms of an "affair of honor."

"The first and foremost rule ...is that the combatants should, as much as possible, meet

on an equal footing. Air and sun must be equally divided...Mr. Shields was just about of medium height, of light weight at the time, by no means strong; while Mr. Lincoln was of towering height, heavy, and long-armed, and of almost superhuman muscular strength...The blame of this opera-buffe affair falls properly on the seconds. It is plain, however, that none attached to Shields.”

While the state job and Trumbull’s marriage became chapters in his life, Trumbull and Koerner challenged the state’s indentured servitude law. “Sarah Borders, a black woman who was held as an indentured servant by Andrew Borders in Randolph County, managed to escape with her three children in 1842. They got as far as Peoria County before they were arrested and jailed.”(26)

They lost in the circuit court before Judge James Shields and appealed his decision to the Illinois Supreme Court. The high court denied the appeal stating “the territorial legislature passed an act authorizing the taking of such an indenture as is set forth in the plea; and the constitution of the state declares that all such contracts and indentures made conformably to that act, without fraud or collusion, shall be valid.”(27) The court responded to claims that while under Andrew Borders control near Sparta, Illinois, Sarah had been beaten and falsely imprisoned by stating: “It is not the province of this court to determine whether it was politic, just or humane, but simply whether the people in convention had the power to fix the condition of people of color, thus situated, at the adoption of our constitution.”(28)

Trumbull, undeterred, next took the case of Joseph Jarrot, a descendent of a slave who was held in the Illinois country (Cahokia) while it was a French possession, who filed “suit in 1843 against Julia Jarrot, his mistress, for wages that he believed he should have received.”(29) Again, Trumbull lost the case before Judge Shields when a St. Clair County jury upheld Julia Jarrot’s position, but Trumbull won on appeal to the state high court. A reconstituted supreme court adopted many of Trumbull’s arguments. Its decision in this suit wrote a legal end to Illinois slavery.(30)

Meanwhile, Koerner, who had been elected to the legislature, “in 1842 almost single-handedly succeeded in bottling up in the Judiciary Committee of the Illinois Senate a bill passed in the House which provided any Negro found in the state, who could not prove his freedom on the basis of legal papers, was to be brought before a justice of the peace to be sentenced to one year in jail and expelled from the state”.(31) However, the legislature continued to pass “black laws” which were aimed at keeping Negroes out of Illinois.

Trumbull joined a group of lawyers that included Abraham Lincoln, Gustave Koerner and John Palmer in advising Negroes who were being held in bondage in Illinois that they were not legally held as slaves and that they were entitled to their freedom.(32) "In many instances these men fearlessly stood by their opinions and defended successfully in the courts, without money and without price, Negroes who were thought to be deprived of their freedom," stated Newton Harris in, *History of Negro Slavery in Illinois and of the Slavery Agitation in that State*. Dwight Harris, in Roske's *His Own Counsel*, also recognized their work.

"The period of greatest struggle and greatest triumph for anti-slavery advocates was from 1840 to 1845. It was carried on chiefly through the benevolence of a comparatively small number of citizens who were actuated by a firm belief in the evils of slavery...among these were Nathaniel Niles, Gustave Koerner and Lyman Trumbull. (all of Belleville) They were the most powerful friend of the negro and fought their cases in the lower courts time and again, often without fees or remuneration."

The unpopularity of Trumbull's anti-slavery struggle did not seem to affect his growing prestige and esteem. Even his pro-slavery neighbors in Belleville and the adjoining counties were impressed with the high standards of integrity, personal austerity and courage of the Yankee lawyer. (33)

Lyman and Julia enjoyed married life in Belleville with their son and daughter. Julia wrote to her father-in-law "I wish you could look in on us tonight and see what a happy little family we are. Lyman and myself have just been teaching Sarah chess; now while I write, they sit before the fire reading." (34)

Julia wrote from Belleville to Lyman's sister in 1843, "We are boarding in a private family, have two rooms which Mrs. Blackwell, the landlady, has furnished neatly, and for my part, I am anticipating a very delightful winter. Lyman is now at court which keeps him very much engaged and I am left to enjoy myself as best I can until George comes around this afternoon to play chess with me."(35)

The *Belleville Weekly Advocate newspaper* published twenty ads between 1840 and 1850 calling for the return of runaway slaves by their owners, or the apprehension by the sheriff of runaways, or apprehension of Negroes who did not have credentials of freedom. In 1843, two slaves owned by former Lieutenant Governor William A. Kinney, who farmed land that would later become the site of the Glen Addie estate east of Belleville, were being held by the sheriff.

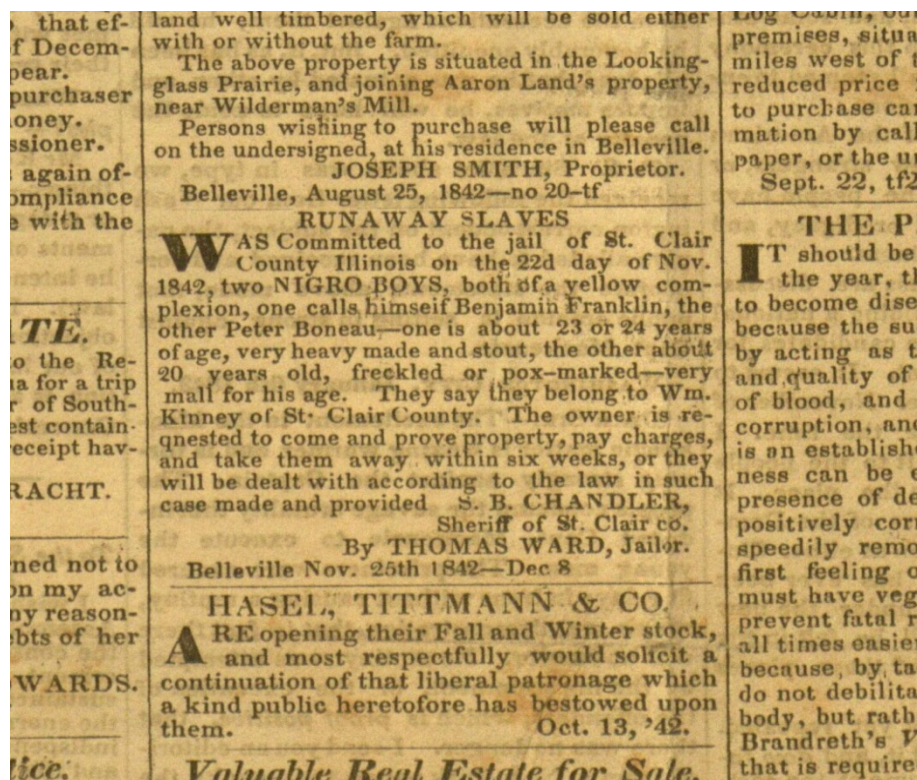


Image courtesy of the History, Philosophy and Newspaper Library, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Kinney had not yet claimed the two boys as of January 5, 1843, the day this ad ran in the newspaper.

The *St. Clair Gazette* ran this ad March 23, 1835: "A Negro Boy for Sale. He is about 10 years of age—has to serve till he is thirty five. Said boy will be sold low for ready money. For further particulars apply at this office. "(the newspaper office.)

A June 30, 1842, *Belleville Weekly Advocate* ad offered a "reward of six cents will be paid to any person or persons who will deliver up to the undersigned one Michael Mulligan, an apprentice who runaway on the 15th June, 1842." The odd amount of the reward was also listed in a September 8, 1836 ad in the *Belleville Representative* newspaper: "Six Cents Reward Ranaway from the subscriber on the 22nd. Inst. an indented Apprentice to the blacksmithing business by the name of William Brownfield. He is between 16 and 17 years of age. All persons are cautioned against trusting or harboring said boy on my account. The above reward will be paid for his return, but no expenses."

The July 11, 1840 *Belleville Weekly Advocate* advertised a runaway slave being held by Sheriff S. B. Chandler: "Was committed to the jail of St. Clair county on Wednesday the 1st of July, 1840, a negro boy,

of yellow complexion, who calls himself William Johnson, about eighteen years old, and about five feet high...The owner is requested to come and prove property, pay charges, and take him away, within six weeks, or he will be dealt with according to the laws of the State of Illinois.”

The horror of slavery was put on display for Bellevillians in November of 1843, when “190 slaves in charge of their owner from Virginia passed through the city en-route to northwest Missouri to work in the hemp and tobacco industry.”(36)

In 1848, Trumbull was elected to the Illinois Supreme Court. His friend Koerner had completed a three year term on the high court in 1848, but he did not seek another term because of the relatively low pay. Koerner and Trumbull heard Abraham Lincoln argue cases before them and became aware of his legal skills.

Koerner was returning from court in Waterloo in 1857 and while riding in his buggy down Main Street he noticed a large crowd in front of the Justice of the Peace office. A Negro, Jackson Redmond, had been found in violation of one of the onerous black laws. Koerner explained in his *Memoirs*:

“If any Negro or mulatto, slave or free, should come into the state and remain ten days with the intention of residing, he might be taken before any justice of the peace, and if found guilty by the jury, should be fined \$50, and if unable to pay, should be sold publicly to anyone who would pay the fine and costs.”(37)

Koerner told the crowd:“As long as I live in Belleville, no man shall be sold if I can help it.” He paid the fine and costs, which totaled \$67.(38)

Trumbull had moved his family to Alton because of ill health. “Belleville had a large incidence of malaria and other diseases and Trumbull’s wife and children were often sick.”(39) A cholera epidemic was moving through Missouri and Illinois. Koerner remembered the situation in his *Memoirs*:

”In going to my office in the morning I found funeral crafes attached to the doors of many houses. Soon we had twenty cases a day, mostly fatal ones, which considering Belleville had hardly more

than five thousand inhabitants, was a large death rate.

On the public square and other places, large piles of wood were lighted for the purpose of purifying the air.

Thick smoke enwrapped the whole city. No one who has not witnessed a raging epidemic can have any idea how people feel in the midst of it.”(40)

Belleville recorded 212 deaths from the epidemic.(41)

In 1849, General James Shields returned to Belleville and politics after nearly dying in the battle of Cerro Gordo in the Mexican-American War. “Shields ordered an attack...the defenders...struck Shields in the chest with a one and a half inch piece of grape shot. It tore through his right lung before exiting close to the center of his back near his spine. Shields fell to the ground, a bloody mess.”(42) Medics carried him to safety. They could do nothing further to prevent his blood loss. At that moment, a captured Mexican prisoner of war by the name of Mc Millan, who had been trained as a doctor in Ireland, appeared as an angel of mercy. He asked to see Shields wound.

“McMillan removed a silk handkerchief from his satchel, wrapped it around a ramrod and gently but firmly pressed the rod and handkerchief through Shields’ chest, along the shrapnel track, into his lung. He then delicately removed the ramrod, leaving the silk cloth in place inside the chest cavity. By passing the silk entirely through Shields’ body, he was able to seal the wound. Once inside the chest, the silk expanded acting both as a matrix and compress to congeal the blood oozing from the lacerated lung.”(43)

On his return home, Shields was given a hero’s reception and parade in St. Louis and Belleville. All of the prominent Democrats were in attendance except Trumbull.



General James Shields, Library of Congress

The war hero, with the help of his powerful friend Senator Stephen A. Douglas, was elected by the Illinois legislature to represent the state in the United States Senate. Shields would be best man when Douglas married Adele Cutts in November, 1856.

Douglas sponsored the Kansas Nebraska Act in 1854 which would allow voters in those two territories to legalize slavery. The possible expansion of slavery caused a rift in the Democrat party. Trumbull was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1854 and was being urged by anti-slavery men to run against Shields who was seeking re-election in 1855.

Shields had tried to block Trumbull's appointment to the Secretary of State office in 1842. Trumbull countered by blocking Shields' nomination for congress in 1843.

A November 23, 1854 letter from Trumbull to fellow Anti-Nebraska Democrat John Palmer revealed Trumbull's distaste for Shields:

"I am for any good Anti-Nebraska Democrat.

There are many reasons why I wish to see

Shields defeated and I would be for almost any

man as against him. My own position, having

just been elected to the lower House, is such

that I think it would be exceedingly impolitic for

me to think of being a candidate...How will Koerner do?"(44)

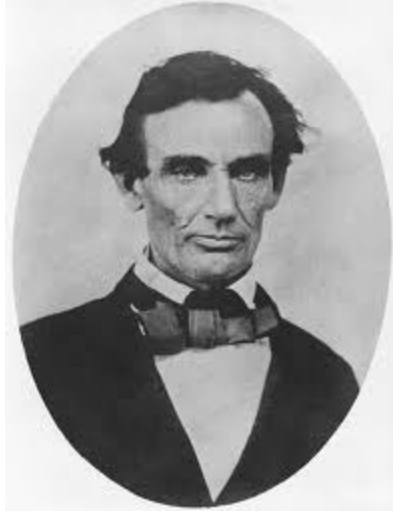
Koerner, elected Lieutenant Governor 1852, could not run against Shields, his former law partner, and “best American friend” , but, Koerner told Shields he could not support him for reelection because of his pro-Nebraska vote in the senate, which was a debt owed to Douglas. (45)

Trumbull decided to enter the contest. At the same time, Abraham Lincoln re-entered politics because of his opposition to the Kansas Nebraska Act. Lieutenant Governor Koerner presided over the legislature as the voting began for the senate seat. Lincoln needed 50 votes; he had 45, Shields 41 and Trumbull 5. After four ballots, Lincoln dropped to 38, Shields still had 41 and Trumbull 11. By the eighth ballot, Lincoln saw he could not be elected and asked his supporters to vote for Trumbull. Trumbull was elected with no votes to spare. Observers said if Douglas had switched his support from Shields on the eighth or ninth ballot, darkhorse Democrat Governor Joel Matteson could have been elected.

Shields was out of Illinois politics, but far from done: He moved to Minnesota and then Missouri and represented those states in the U.S. Senate, becoming the only man to serve three states in the upper body.(46) While in Minnesota, he founded a community of immigrant Irish about ten miles from Fairbault. The town was named Shieldsville. He is honored with a statue in the rotunda of the state capitol as St. Paul. When the Minnesota experience soured because of a poor national economy, Shields moved to California and in 1861 married Mary Carr. His life would take another course when the Civil War started.

Koerner and Trumbull decided to leave the Democrat party because of its slavery stance. Lincoln joined them in forming the Republican Party with an eye on unseating Stephen A. Douglas in the 1858 U.S. Senate election. Douglas , who was at odds with Democrat President James Buchanan and had split the Democrat party on the slavery issue with the Kansas Nebraska Act, had fractured his political base.

“Opposed by a president from his own party, Senator Douglas began the year in 1858 uncertain about his upcoming reelection. Some leaders of the new Republican Party saw this as a great opportunity. Horace Greeley, a leading Republican newspaper editor from New York, talked openly about the possibility of accepting Douglas in the Republican Party.”(47)



Abraham Lincoln, at the time of the 1858 election. Library of Congress

Republicans, meeting June 16, 1858, in state convention at Springfield with Koerner as chairman, heard Koerner make his position clear on Greeley's interference in the Illinois contest. "We must make them understand Lincoln is our man;"(48) the convention endorsed Lincoln "as their first and only choice."(39) A series of seven debates between Lincoln and Douglas took place around the state as each outlined his position on slavery. Koerner sat on the dais with Lincoln at the Alton debate. Trumbull also stumped for Lincoln, but Douglas was returned to the senate.

Meanwhile, Trumbull continued to hound Douglas in the slavery debate. Koerner praised Trumbull's ability in his *Memoirs*:

"No one, I know very well from my intimate knowledge of Trumbull's peculiar ability, could cope with Douglas better than he. He was as untiring and indefatigable in argument as Douglas; indeed no one could wear him out... He was a master in discovering every weak point in the aims of his antagonist and never failed to hit it."(49)



Senator Stephen A. Douglas, Library of Congress

In 1859, Trumbull outlined his position as a conservative Republican who opposed slavery.

“When we say all men are created equal, we do not mean that every man in organized society has the same rights. We do not tolerate that in Illinois. I know there is a distinction between the two races because the Almighty himself has marked it upon their faces; and, in my judgment, man cannot, by legislation...produce a perfect equality between these two races, so that they will live happily together.(50)

Trumbull said Republicans opposed the expansion of slavery to new areas but would not oppose slavery in the states where it legally existed.(51) He also favored relocating the free black population. “He foresaw the day Negroes would be free and would be colonized in some region of the country, not far distant, to which our free Negro population may be taken...to a place where they would not be dominated and where they could develop their powers.”(52)

The seven debates with Douglas were covered by eastern newspapers and served to introduce Lincoln as a leading Republican spokesman. Lincoln let his supporters know he would like the party's nomination for president in 1860. Koerner worked hard to get Lincoln nominated at the party's Chicago convention. His efforts continued as an organizer at the precinct level in St. Clair county. He had gathered names of Republican voters and sent circulars to every county precinct. In an April 1860, letter to Trumbull, Koerner expressed optimism about Republican chances of success.

“We had a very fine county convention,
nearly every precinct well represented.
This was preceded by precinct meetings,
some of which were largely attended.
There has not been such organization here
since 1840, and I think even then we had
no such regularity. There is much feeling
among our party, and everything augurs well.”(53)

Democrats were fractured over the slavery issue and a fight between Douglas and President James Buchanan. Republicans were successful in electing Lincoln and that prompted southern states to secede from the Union. Although Koerner had battled Douglas for six years over the Kansas Nebraska Act and denounced his ambitions publicly on many occasions, Koerner recalled the scene in a letter to his wife, Sophie, as he and Douglas sat next to each other as old friends when President Lincoln was sworn into office.

“Lincoln is president. In the presence of at least 10,000
people he took the oath and read with a firm voice
his inaugural. I stood close to his chair; next to me stood
Douglas...while the weather was fine, it was nevertheless
quite cold on that platform. Douglas had no
overcoat and I saw he was shivering. I had not only
a big overcoat on but also a thick traveling shawl,
which I flung over him to make him comfortable.”(54)

Douglas died three months later.

Trumbull had campaigned for Lincoln, but his lack of enthusiasm was noted.

“Perhaps the awareness that he preceded Lincoln as a national figure prevented Trumbull from ever deferring to his fellow Illinoisan. Besides, Trumbull never appreciated Lincoln’s ability to play the President’s role by ear; to Trumbull, such flexibility smacked of the chameleon on plaid... Trumbull realized that Lincoln had the faculty of compelling almost every man within his reach to be his tool, the more cunning the man, the sharper the tool. Instead of as a figurehead, Lincoln emerged a fountain-head of power.”(55)

Carl Sandburg, author of *Abraham Lincoln, the Prairie Years*,, quoted Trumbull’s assessment of Lincoln’s personality:

“Trumbull was never one of Mr. Lincoln’s fervent supporters or admirers. He (Trumbull) wrote of Lincoln: He’s a trimmer, and such a trimmer as the world has ever seen...He is secretive, communicates no more of his own thoughts and purposes than he think will serve the ends he has in view; he has the faculty of gain the confidence of others by apparently giving them his own, and in that way attaches to himself many friends; he is one of the shrewdest men I have ever known; he is by no means the unsophisticated, artless man that

many make him to be.”(56)

Lincoln and Trumbull had very different personalities, according to Trumbull biographer Ralph Roske:

“Trumbull was more reserved and more family-oriented than Mr. Lincoln. Unlike Lincoln, he never relished the rough masculine company of the judicial circuit. Trumbull was no yarnspinner, and the evenings around the pot-bellied stoves in taverns seemed dull. He missed his comfortable home and garden.”(57)

After Lincoln’s election in 1860, Illinois prepared for war with the newly-elected Governor Richard Yates. Koerner had finished his term as Lieutenant Governor and knew the apparatus of state government, writing in his *Memoirs*: “Trumbull and myself are the confidential advisers to Yates and have to direct him with everything.” Koerner met with Lincoln in January, 1861, when Lincoln sought his opinion of appointments to his cabinet. Both Koerner and Norman Judd, a Trumbull friend, lobbied against the appointment of Simon Cameron to head the War Department. Lincoln made the appointment, but removed Cameron later when allegations of corruption in awarding contracts came to light.

Koerner wrote January 2, 1861, to Trumbull to do his pleading with Lincoln for a foreign service appointment, preferably Germany. Koerner told Trumbull his reading of French and German newspapers and written contact with friends in Europe convinced him the appointments made so far were not having an impact.

“I can discover no influence evinced in the journals of either France, Germany, Belgium or Switzerland. Public opinion on the entire continent is setting against us. The rebels have taken hold of several leading papers and periodicals, and by representing their fight as one against a high tariff and for ‘free trade’ and against religious and social

intolerance, they work upon the liberal party.

The scarcity of cotton, which has already compelled the master manufacturers in France and Germany to reduce the hours of labor, and in some instances shut up entirely, affects the industrial laborers....As for England she is a bully, and her great indignation is all sham. She wants to open the cotton ports." (58)

Koerner then reported to Trumbull recruiting for the army had come to a standstill as those on hand had been trained and were ready for action, but qualified officers were needed.

"Every effort is making to get men from the regular army into command. There is a half crazy fellow, Sherman,(William Tecumseh) whom they could not stand in Ohio, and who also made himself unpleasant in Sedalia" (Missouri) who has "come back to St. Louis, and has command of Benton Barracks, and is treating the 10,000 volunteers there to a course of regular military tyranny, which they won't stand long. Most of the Westpointers are very little account. Most all of them are dissipated and tyrannical, and they hate everybody not of their caste."(59)

Koerner then condemned profiteering by contractors and their military contacts.

"The corruption and swindling in the army seems to be alarming...Every officer who is caught in such nefarious transactions ought to be made an example of. Almost every Colonel who raised

a regiment seems to have tried to make money by it. This is an alarming sign of the times, and that too in a Civil War, where the country is bleeding from every pore....Lincoln, so honest himself, can afford to let his displeasure heavily rest upon every person, who is found out, his cabinet not accepted.”(60)

Koerner wrote to Trumbull four times in March, 1861, apprising him of efforts to raise troops for the war. In a March 31, 1861, letter Koerner expressed his disappointment at not having received the appointment as ambassador to Germany, although advance word had leaked out that Koerner would get the position.

“I was surprised at the deep feeling of mortification amongst all my friends on account of not receiving the Berlin mission. The Germans in Chicago, St. Louis and Belleville are indignant at Judd, because they consider him as the cause of their disappointment.”(61)

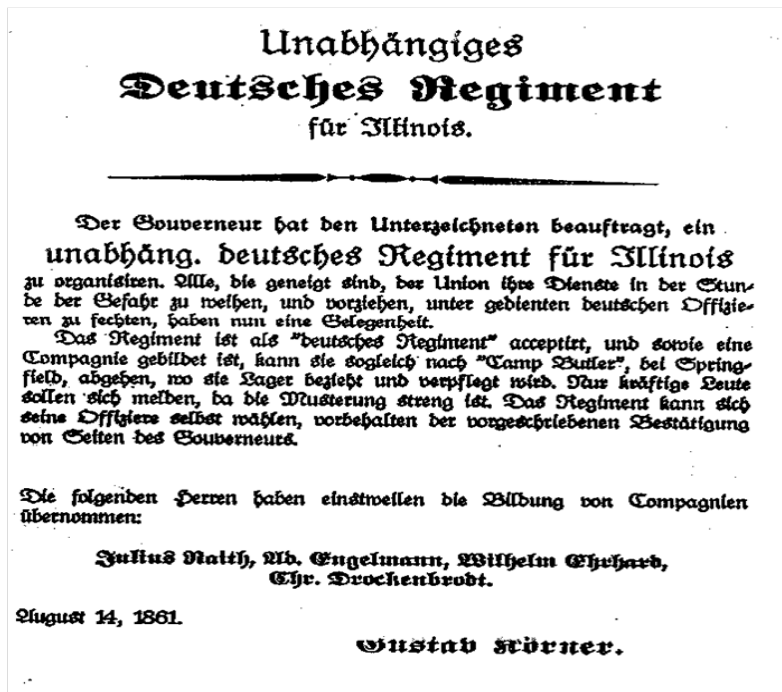
Norman Judd, a loyal Lincoln supporter who Trumbull supported for a cabinet position, was given the German assignment. The letter continued “I do think, and they (the Germans) all seem to demand it, that under the circumstances Mr. L ought to offer me something at least, the mission to Austria or Switzerland.”(62) A year later Lincoln would appoint Koerner Minister Plenipotentiary and Envoy Extraordinary to Spain.

Koerner asked Trumbull in a July 24, 1861, letter to present his request to the president to raise two German regiments. Lincoln explained his dilemma in an August 18, 1861, letter to Koerner.

“ Without occupying our standpoint you cannot conceive how this subject embarrasses us. We have promises out to more than 400 regiments, which, if they all come, are more than we want. If they all come, we cannot take yours;

if they do not all come, we shall want yours. And yet, we have no possible means of knowing whether they will all come or not. I hope you will make due allowances for the embarrassment thus produced.”(63)

A few months later Illinois Governor Yates authorized formation of Koerner’s regiment, the 43rd Illinois Infantry, which was made up of German immigrants from Belleville, Mascoutah, Shiloh, Lebanon and other areas of southwest and central Illinois.



German language poster asking for enlistments in the Koerner 43rd Illinois Infantry Regiment

Responding to the call for experienced military men, General James Shields, who earned that rank as a hero twelve years earlier at Cerro Gordo, Mexico, offered his services. Lincoln, showing no ill feeling from their 1842 showdown, appointed him to the rank of Brigadier General . March 22, 1862, Shields

was shot from his horse and suffered a broken arm, but continued to direct the battle of Kernstown, Virginia, where he defeated Confederate General Stonewall Jackson. Bruce Catton, a popular Civil War historian, wrote:

"Jackson was roundly whipped and he had to retreat up the Shenandoah Valley after a savage little battle which Shields' boys recalled later with vast pride theirs' was the only outfit in the Union army which could say it had licked Stonewall Jackson in open fight."(64)

Shields, suffering pulmonary distress from the lung injury suffered in the Mexican American War, coupled with the pain from his recent war wound, decided to retire from the army. Shields would campaign for Koerner and Trumbull in 1872 when Democrats joined Liberal Republicans, and in the process, finally mend fences with Trumbull. Shields also held several elected offices in Missouri and died at Ottumwa, Iowa, on June 1, 1879.



Civil War General James Shields

A December 12, 1861, letter from Koerner to Senator Trumbull contained Koerner's thoughts on waging the war as a constitutional issue.

"The slavery question is a very delicate one. You know I have never been ultra on it. I always realized the extreme difficulty of its solution. We must care more now against a cry being raised against our party, that we are carrying on the war for universal emancipation. The secession papers are trying to foist that issue upon us. We must keep this war within the constitution and not have its purpose perverted."(65)

But Trumbull, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee and ever the independent thinker, took the position that freeing the slaves was a legitimate goal of the conflict. Speaking on the floor of the Senate in favor of the First Confiscation Act, Trumbull said:

"The right to free the slaves of rebels would be equally clear with that to confiscate their property generally, for it is as property that they profess to hold them; but as one of the most efficient means of attaining the end for which the armies of the Union have been called forth, the right to restore them the God-given liberty of which they have been deprived, is doubly clear."(66)

Trumbull sponsored the Freedmen's Bureau Bill, First Civil Rights Act and he co-authored the Thirteenth Amendment which abolished slavery. Lincoln's friend, Ward Hill Lamon, wrote how Lincoln

signed the Thirteenth Amendment in the spirit of the moment:”Subsequently, however, the Senate, at the instance of Senator Lyman Trumbull, who as a gifted hair-splitter, adopted a resolution that such approval by the President was unnecessary to give effect to the action of Congress.....”(67)

Trumbull was respected by other senators when legislation was being debated. Historian Allan Bogue described Trumbull’s metaphorical shredding of paper as he anticipated shredding an opponent’s argument:”A rather tall and spare gentleman with a sandy complexion and gold spectacles, Trumbull evidenced his nervous energy in his habit of tearing up little scraps of paper while he smilingly pondered the weaknesses of the arguments developed by colleagues.”(68)

Koerner posted this letter to Trumbull on March 22, 1863 from the ministry office in Madrid, Spain, in which he described the effect on him of the Union’s lackluster record in the first two years of the war.

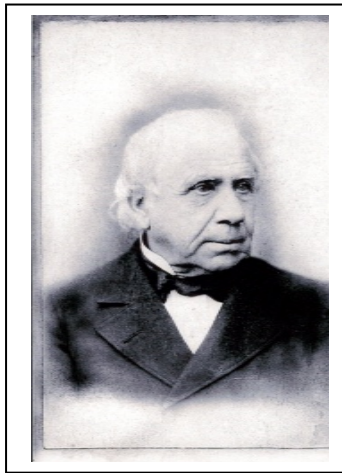
“My situation, under the circumstances, has been a very unpleasant one. For days and weeks I have avoided meetings and reunions where I would have to answer questions, often meant in a very friendly manner, but still embarrassing to me. My family has also lived very retired, for the additional reason that we are not able to return the many hospitalities to which we are invited constantly. We have the greatest trouble in the world to live here in the most modest manner within our means. We forego many of the comforts we were accustomed to at home.”(69)

Koerner resigned the minister’s position, returned to his home at 200 Abend ,Belleville, and resumed his law practice.

Trumbull became dissatisfied with the reconstruction program that was imposed to bring the South back into the Union. After several years, he concluded it would be better to return control of state governments to local authorities. He favored a strong states rights approach and voted against a bill that would have curbed the violence inflicted by the Ku Klux Klan. Trumbull said, “The government of the United States was formed for national and general purposes and not for the protection of the

individual in his personal rights of person and property.” (70) Also, Trumbull had not favored Negro suffrage as a condition for the Southern states’ re-admittance. He believed that only a state could define the conditions of suffrage.(71)

In 1868, during his second term , Trumbull suffered the loss of his wife, Julia, from sickness. She was 45 and left him three sons, Walter, Perry and Henry. Trumbull lived with his sons until 1877, when at age 64 he married 32 year old Mary Ingraham, whom he knew from Connecticut. (72) Five of eight children from both marriages would not live past the age of eleven.



Gustave Koerner, circa 1880's.

Trumbull and Koerner shared a dismal opinion of the Grant administration and saw no change in sight. “I became satisfied In 1872,that the Republican organization had become a body corrupt and that the people were being plundered in almost all branches of the public service.”(73) Trumbull estimated twenty five per cent of all government revenues were being stolen.

Both men joined the new Liberal Republican party and Trumbull was quickly mentioned as a presidential nominee at the group’s convention at Cincinnati in 1872. Trumbull never firmly committed to the idea of seeking the presidency, so, after several ballots convention delegates selected New York newspaper editor Horace Greeley as their presidential candidate. Koerner, a delegate, supported Trumbull for president. He was asked if Trumbull would accept second place on the ticket. Koerner answered, “A man can not swim with a millstone around his neck,”(74) referring to his opinion of Greeley as an inferior candidate who would sink the ticket.

Koerner ran for Illinois Governor with the Liberal Republicans but was defeated. That was his last campaign for office. Trumbull was not returned to the Senate for another term. The duo returned to the Democratic party where they had started three decades earlier.

Koerner spent the last decade of his life practicing law in Belleville and serving on the Belleville Public

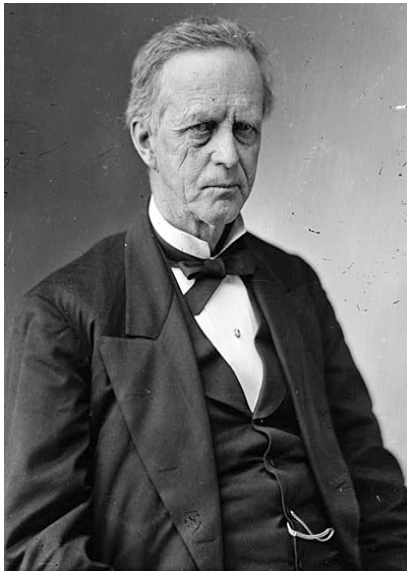
Library board, an institution he and fellow Germans started in 1836. He noted in his *Memoirs*, his association with the library was his fondest achievement . He and his wife Sophie had seven children and one adopted daughter. Three of their children did not live beyond 18 years.

Trumbull's last political chapter was as a supporter of the populist movement in the 1890's while he continued his law practice in Chicago.

Koerner died April 9, 1896, at age 86 at his Belleville home. Trumbull, who wasn't feeling well, agreed to travel from his Chicago home ,against his doctor's advice ,to deliver the funeral oration at Walnut Hill cemetery. The April 17th *Belleville Daily Advocate* reported the dramatic event:

“Hon. Lyman Trumbull, while here on Sunday last attending the funeral of his intimate friend, Gustave Koerner, was taken with a sudden and severe illness, the attack manifesting itself just as he was concluding his remarks at the grave of his old friend. He was taken to the Belleville House where he was attended by Drs. Bechtoldt, Starkel and Raab, who did all in their power to mitigate his suffering.” (75)

Trumbull returned to Chicago and was diagnosed with prostate cancer. He died June 26, 1896.



Lyman Trumbull, late in his Senate career, Library of Congress

Footnotes

- 1 Mark Krug, *Conservative Radical*, p.22-23, New York: A.S. Barnes and Co., Inc., 1962
- 2 Ibid p. 24
- 3 Ibid p. 26
- 4 *Memoirs of Gustave Koerner, Volume 1, p. 425*, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1909
- 5 Ibid p.425
- 6 Horace White ,*Life of Lyman Trumbull*, p. 8, Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin, Riverside Press Co., 1913
- 7 *Memoirs, Vol 1 p.390*
- 8 White, p. 13
- 9 *Ibid p.13*
- 10 *Ibid p. 14*
- 11 John Francis Snyder, *Selected Writings, Part II*,p.170, Illinois State Historical Society, Springfield, Ill., 1962
- 12 Krug, p. 46
- 13 *Belleville Daily Advocate newspaper*, January 3, 1878, letter from J. .L D. Morrison
- 14 *History of St. Clair County ,p. 187*, Philadelphia, Brink McDonough and Co., 1881
- 15 *Memoirs, Vol 1, p.446*
- 16 Ralph Joseph Roske, *His Own Counsel :the life and times of Lyman Trumbull*,p.7, Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1979
- 17 Krug, p.33
- 18 *Ibid p.34*
- 19 *Ibid p.36*
- 20 *Ibid p.45*
- 21 *Ibid p.49*
- 22 J. Sean Callan *Courage and Country*, James Shields: More than Irish luck, p.32, *United States of America, Bloomington, In., 2004*
- 23 *Memoirs, Vol 1, p. 518*
- 24 *Callan, p. 81*
- 25 *Ibid p. 82*
- 26 *Roske, p. 11*
- 27 *Sarah, alias Sarah Borders, vs. Andrew Borders*, Young Scammon Reports of cases in the Supreme Court, State of Illinois, Chicago, Callaghan and Co., 1886, IV 355
- 28 *Ibid*

- 29 Roske, p. 12
- 30 Ibid p.13
- 31 Krug p.62
- 32 Ibid p.66
- 33 Ibid p.67
- 34 White p.53
- 35 *Ibid p. 54*
- 36 *Belleville Weekly Advocate newspaper, November 9, 1843*
- 37 *Memoirs ,Vol 2, p.30*
- 38 *Ibid p.30*
- 39 Krug p.69
- 40 *Memoirs Vol 2, p.55*
- 41 *Krug p.69*
- 42 Callan p.151
- 43 Ibid p. 153
- 44 *A Collection of Letters from Lyman Trumbull to John Palmer 1854-1858, University of Illinois Press on behalf of Illinois State Historical Society*
- 45 *Memoirs, Vol 1 p. 459*
- 46 Callan p.336
- 47 *The Lincoln Douglas Debates, Matthew Pinsker, Journal of American History.org/projects/Lincoln media/pinsker*
- 48 Don Fehrenbacher, *Prelude to Greatness: Lincoln in the 1850's*, p.63, Stanford University Press, 1962
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- 50 *Roske p.54*
- 51 *Ibid p. 54*
- 52 *Krug p.152*
- 53 *Lyman Trumbull letter collection, Library of Congress, Vol.37-40, Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield, Illinois*
- 54 *Memoirs, Vol 2, p.114*
- 55 Krug p. 155
- 56 Carl Sandburg, *The Prairie Years, p. 541*
- 57 Roske p.16
- 58 *Trumbull letter collection, Vol 33*
- 59 *Ibid*
- 60 *Ibid*
- 61 *Ibid*
- 62 *Ibid*
- 63 *Ibid*
- 64 *Callan p. 278*
- 65 *Trumbull letter collection, Vol 33*

66 Krug p. 225

67 *Lyman Trumbull, Mr. Lincoln and Friends, Mr. Lincoln's White House, The Lincoln Institute*,
www.mrlincolnwhitehouse.org/content_inside

68 Krug p225

69 *Trumbull letters vol 33*

70 *Roske p 139*

71 *Ibid p 140*

72 *White p 189*

73 *Krug p 281*

74 *Memoirs vol 1 p 413*

75 *Belleville Daily Advocate, April 17, 1896*