



ABE

Book and Lyrics by Lee Goldsmith

Music by Roger Anderson

SAMUEL FRENCH

Copyright © 2009 by Lee Goldsmith & Roger Anderson
Now published and licensed by Samuel French, Inc.
Lincoln, the Railsplitter, Collection of the Butler Institute of American Art

www.abethemusical.com

www.samuel french.com

AUTHORS' NOTES

The play is written for a simple, open and easily re-configured scenic design that allows for speedy transitions from scene to scene. The musical is also suited for concert staging.

The symbolic and literal idea of *construction* is interesting to us as suggested in Scene 2 where the set is assembled or finished during "Fifteen Houses" with similar scenic fulfillment throughout Act One; *deconstruction* being illustrated during Act Two. Abe and Mary should be in as stark a setting as possible in the final moments of the play.

No performance or use of this script is allowed without written authorization from Samuel French, Inc.

MUSICAL NUMBERS - ACT ONE

1. FIFTEEN HOUSES.....Denton, Mentor, Ann, Jim, townspeople
2. HARDIN COUNTY, KENTUCKY Abe
3. A GIRL LIKE HER..... Abe
4. CORN..... Denton, Jack, tavern patrons
5. WHO ARE YOU?..... Abe
6. A MAN LIKE HIM..... Ann
7. TWO HUNDRED SEVENTY SEVEN TO THREE Jack, Jim, townspeople
8. A GIRL LIKE YOU..... Abe, Ann
9. MRS. ABRAHAM LINCOLN Mary
10. WHAT AM I BID?..... Billy, Guests

MUSICAL NUMBERS - ACT TWO

1. MRS. ABRAHAM LINCOLN (REPRISE) Mary
2. SOMEONE..... Abe
3. WHAT WOULD I DO WITH DAUGHTERS? Abe, Bob, Willie, Tad
4. A MOMENT LIKE THIS ONE Abe, Mary
5. WHO, ABE? YOU, ABE! Billy, Delegates
6. HARDIN COUNTRY / WHO ARE YOU? (REPRISE) Abe

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE

- SCENE ONE: A slave auction, New Orleans, 1829
- SCENE TWO: Main Street of New Salem, Summer, 1831
- SCENE THREE: A Saturday night at the Rutledge Tavern, New Salem, Autumn, 1831
- SCENE FOUR: Denton Offutt's store, New Salem, Winter, 1832
- SCENE FIVE: Various part of New Salem, Summer, 1832
- SCENE SIX: A wooded part of the Rutledge farm, New Salem, Summer, 1835
- SCENE SEVEN: The same, Autumn, 1835
- SCENE EIGHT: A cotillion ball at the American House Hotel, Springfield, 1840

ACT TWO

- SCENE ONE: Various parts of Springfield, 1840
- SCENE TWO: Law office of Lincoln and Herndon, Springfield, 1848
- SCENE THREE: The Lincoln home, Springfield, Christmas Eve, 1859
- SCENE FOUR: Mathew Brady's photography studio, New York City, February, 1860
- SCENE FIVE: Outside "The Wigwam", Chicago's convention hall, May, 1860
- SCENE SIX: The Springfield telegraph office, Election Night, November, 1860
- SCENE SEVEN: The Lincoln home, Springfield, the morning of February 11th, 1861

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(In order of appearance)

ABE LINCOLN

MENTOR GRAHAM, New Salem schoolteacher

JIM RUTLEDGE, New Salem tavern owner

ANN RUTLEDGE, his daughter

DENTON OFFUTT, New Salem storekeeper

JACK ARMSTRONG, one of the Clary's Grove Boys

ANOTHER CLARY'S GROVE BOY

MRS. CAMERON, New Salem townswoman

1ST CAMERON DAUGHTER

2ND CAMERON DAUGHTER

MARY TODD, a visitor in Springfield

ELIZABETH EDWARDS, her sister

NINIAN EDWARDS, Elizabeth's husband, a Springfield politician

1ST MALE GUEST

2ND MALE GUEST

BILLY HERNDON, a young lawyer

1ST LADY GUEST

2ND LADY GUEST

MARY'S DANCING PARTNER

A SPRINGFIELD CITIZEN

HIS WIFE

ROBERT LINCOLN)

WILLIE LINCOLN) --Abe and Mary's sons

TAD LINCOLN)

MR. BROOKS, a New York reporter

MR. BRIGGS, a New York politician

MATHEW BRADY, photographer

JASON ROGERS, a young man

1ST ILLINOIS DELEGATE

2ND ILLINOIS DELEGATE

TIM CARTER, delegate from Ohio

A TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

ACT ONEScene One

A SLAVE AUCTION, NEW ORLEANS, 1829. The stage is alive with men, women, children, prostitutes, pimps, pickpockets, young bucks, New Orleans belles, ragamuffin urchins, etc. The crowd is perhaps suggested by silhouettes and moving shadows. There is a social, even carnival atmosphere. Center stage, there are two slaves and an auctioneer.

The scene is performed in dance, mime and choreographed movement set to music. At one point, the forcible parting of the two black slaves causes a small quickly-squelched uproar. A sudden, deafening blast of a nearby riverboat horn is heard over the music.

The auction ends, the lights gradually begin to dim. The crowd slowly disperses until, at last, only one figure is left--a nineteen year old ABE LINCOLN, gazing thoughtfully at the empty auction ring.

All the lights are gone now, except for one spot on him. When the lights come up again, he and we are into--

Scene Two

THE MAIN STREET OF NEW SALEM,
ILLINOIS, SUMMER, 1831.

A plain, poor wooden-faced mill
town, set on the Illinois prairie.
Some construction is underway.

ABE is still standing as we left
him. MENTOR GRAHAM enters. He is
about a foot shorter than ABE,
school-teacherish, about thirty. He
gazes at ABE for a moment, then
comes up to him.

MENTOR
How's everything over in Indiana?

ABE
Beg pardon?

MENTOR
Can you see what's running in the Wabash?

ABE
(Smiles)
Oh--you're jokin' me. About my height. Folks usually say--
"How's the weather up there?"

MENTOR
Well--how is it?

ABE
Like the old lady said-- "Cooler'n hell but not by much."

MENTOR
(Holds out his hand)
Mentor Graham. School teacher. When I have anyone to teach.

ABE
(Shaking his hand)
Abe Lincoln. You could teach me. I'm ignorant as they come.

MENTOR
(Appraising him)
I doubt that. Then you're not just passing through?

ABE
I hope not. I'm supposed to be Denton Offutt's new store
clerk--but I can't find him.

MENTOR

Denton's a coming-and-going man. He'll turn up. How do you like New Salem?

ABE

Well--(Looking around) Like the old lady said-- "Paris France ain't as pretty as my home town--and if I ever see it, I'll tell it so."

JIM RUTLEDGE, owner of New Salem's tavern, enters hurriedly, followed by his pretty daughter, ANN. She is about eighteen.

JIM

Damn that McNeil! Down with a fever on Election Day!

ANN

Pa, it's not his fault--

JIM

I don't see how a man that weak will make much of a husband for you, Annie.

ANN

Pa! Not in front of--well--strangers--

MENTOR

(Indicates ABE)

This fellow's no stranger. I've been watching him wandering around town for almost two hours. That's longer than most people stay.

JIM

(Eyes ABE speculatively)

Can you read and write, son?

ABE

Oh, I guess I can make a few rabbit tracks.

JIM

We need another election clerk to help Mentor here. The one we had took sick. How would you like the job for the day? Pay is fifty cents--courtesy of the State of Illinois--and a hot dinner at the Rutledge Tavern--courtesy of me and my daughter, Ann.

ABE

(Nods to ANN)

Ma'am. (to JIM) What do I have to do?

JIM

Nothing to it. The voters tell the election judges who they want to vote for. The judges tell you. And you write down the names.

ABE

Seems to me that leaves things open for a lot of crooked countin'.

MENTOR

(Slaps ABE on the back)

Abe--you're a born politician!

JIM

What's your whole name, Abe?

ABE

Lincoln. Abe Lincoln.

JIM

Lincoln--Lincoln. Where do I know that name from?

ANN

(Smiles at ABE)

Didn't Mr. Offutt tell us that was the name of his new clerk?

JIM

That's it. Well, Denton ain't back from buyin' his stock yet--so you're unemployed 'til then. You might as well earn that four bits.

ABE

Thanks. I can sure use it. But fifty cents seems like a lot of money for just a little politickin'.

MENTOR

That's another good thing about politics, Abe. The less you do, the more you earn.

DENTON OFFUTT enters, followed by three brawny young men; one of them is named JACK ARMSTRONG. Each is carrying a huge, bulging wrapped bale.

DENTON

Blast and damn those muddy bogs that call themselves roads! My wagon's probably stuck 'til first frost. All right, Jack--boys--set 'em down easy. (They do so) Hello, Abe. Welcome to New Salem.

ANN

(Examines the bales curiously)
Whatever's in them, Mr. Offutt?

DENTON

Name it, Ann, and I've got it. Candle wicking--calico--bar
iron--bullet molds--flannels--buttons--molasses--thread--
cutlery--combs--

ANN

Combs! Oh, I need some new combs!

JACK

Let me buy you one, Ann.

JIM

You know better'n that, Jack. Ann's spoken for.

ABE

(Takes a small, white comb from his
pocket, hands it to ANN)
Ever see one like this, Miss Rutledge?

ANN

Oh, it's beautiful! What's it made of?

ABE

Ivory. It belonged to my ma.

ANN

She must have set a store by it. (Hands it back, smiling)
Thank you for showing it to me, Mr. Lincoln.

DENTON

(Gives a coin to JACK and the two boys)
All right, boys. Here's your wages.

JIM

That's right. Make it from Denton and spend it at Rutledge's
Tavern.

As the three begin to go, JACK takes
a small, partly-filled whiskey
bottle from his pocket, showing it
exaggeratedly to his companions.

JACK

That reminds me. Did you ever see a whiskey bottle like
this, boys?

1st BOY

(simpering)

Oh, Jack! It's beautiful!

JACK

Yep. It belonged to my ma.

They exit uproariously. Everyone laughs but ANN.

ANN

They're trash! The Clary's Grove Boys! Just trash! And that Jack's the worst--

MENTOR

You'll probably have to tangle with them before you're done, Abe.

ABE

I sure hope not. Like the old lady said, "Fightin's the coward's way--thank goodness I'm brave!"

ANN

Do you still want to live in New Salem, Mr. Lincoln?

JIM

Course he does! This town ain't much to look at right now, Abe--but it's enough for a beginnin'--

(Sings)

FIFTEEN HOUSES,
A HUNDRED PEOPLE,
WHAT MORE COULD YOU WANT TO START WITH?

The street begins to fill with TOWNSPEOPLE. During the course of the song, construction continues and election tables get set up, ledgers get ceremoniously unlocked, a banner is strung up: "ELECTION TODAY--VOTE HERE".

ALL

FIFTEEN HOUSES,
A HUNDRED PEOPLE
AND WE WOULD NEVER PART WITH ONE!

DENTON

WE GOT US A SAWMILL--
AND WE GOT A SCHOOL

MENTOR

WHERE I CAN MAKE A GENIUS
FROM A JACKASS FOOL--

ANN

TWO DOCTORS--
ONE OF 'EM FOR FOLK--

JIM

--AND A SALOON!

DENTON

A CHURCH WITH A SPIRE
AND A SQUIRE WHO'S RICH--

MENTOR

NOW ONE OF 'EM IS CROOKED,
BUT I WON'T SAY WHICH--

ANN

TWO SHERIFFS,
JUST TO KEEP THE PEACE--

JIM

--AND A SALOON!

ALL

FIFTEEN HOUSES,
A HUNDRED PEOPLE,
STAY A WHILE AND GET TO MEET SOME!

FIFTEEN HOUSES,
A HUNDRED PEOPLE,
WE'LL BE THE COUNTY SEAT SOME
DAY!

(sounds of hammer, ax, woodworking)

DENTON

THE SANGAMON RIVER
IS SO FULL O' FISH,
THEY JUMP INTO YOUR SKILLET
IF YOU STAND AND WISH--

DENTON & MENTOR

MAIL COACH COMES
EV'RY SEVEN DAYS--

JIM

--AND A SALOON!

ALL
 ONE HUNDRED PEOPLE CAME FROM SOMEWHERE
 NOW WE'RE HERE TO STAY--
 WE RAISE OUR CROPS, WE RAISE OUR CHILDREN,
 WORKING EVERY DAY--
 THROUGH FIRE AND FLOOD
 WE TRUST IN THE LORD AND STAY!

ANN
 SOME GOD-FEARIN' WOMEN
 WHO CAN SEW A FINE HEM--

MENTOR
 THE WOMEN FEARED O' GOD
 THE MEN AFEARED O' THEM--

DENTON
 POST OFFICE
 (Winking at ABE)
 AND A NICE SALOON--

JIM
 --AND A SA--
 (Stops abruptly as he realizes they
 have stolen his line)

ALL
 FIFTEEN HOUSES!
 A HUNDRED PEOPLE! (Repeat)

PHILADELPHIA--
 NEW YORK CITY--
 OUR NEW SALEM SURELY NOT IS!

THEY'VE GOT THINGS
 THAT WE AIN'T SEEN YET,
 BUT WHAT THEY HAVEN'T GOT IS
 US!

SOLOISTS
 FIFTEEN HOUSES!
 A HUNDRED PEOPLE! (Repeat)

CHORUS
 --US!

EVERYONE
 FIFTEEN HOUSES!
 A HUNDRED PEOPLE!
 THAT'S US!

As the song ends, everyone drifts
 off except ABE, JIM, DENTON, MENTOR
 and ANN.

DENTON

(Indicates bales)

Can you get these up to the store for me, Abe? Jack and the others must be drunker'n coot owls over at Jim's tavern by now.

ABE

I'll take care of it, Denton.

DENTON

You're a good boy. I knew I did the right thing hirin' you. (He goes.)

JIM

Where did you and Denton meet?

ABE

At my uncle John Hanks' farm. He hired me as a flatboat pilot to take some cargo down to New Orleans.

ANN

New Orleans! Is it as beautiful as they say?

ABE

Well, it's sure the biggest, most frightenin' place I ever saw in my life!

MENTOR

Where are you from, Abe?

(Music begins)

ABE

Hardin County--down in Kentucky. (Smiles at ANN) Now, there's a beautiful place, Miss Rutledge. Unusual, too.

ANN

Unusual? How?

ABE

(Sings)

AT THE FOOT OF A HILL
IS A KIND OF A CAVE
WITH PLENTY OF ROOM TO STAND--

AND RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE
IS A CLEAR, COOL SPRING
THAT RIPPLES NICE 'N EASY WHILE YOU FILL
YOUR HAND--

ABE (cont'd)

THAT HILL
AND THAT CAVE
AND THAT FLOWING SPRING
WERE IN HARDIN COUNTY, KENTUCKY--

AND I NEVER TASTED
SWEETER WATER
SINCE.

(Now singing mostly to ANN)

ME AND MY SISTER
PICKED CURRANTS AND BLUES--
GRAPES GREW WILD AND SWEET--

THERE WAS CORN AND RABBIT,
THERE WAS COON AND PERCH--
YOU GOT FAT JUST FROM WONDERIN' WHAT
TO
EAT--

AND ALL THOSE VITTLES
THAT TASTED SO GOOD
CAME FROM HARDIN COUNTY, KENTUCKY--

AND I NEVER HAD ME
BETTER EATIN'
SINCE.

I SLEPT IN A BED WAY UP UNDER A ROOF
AND THE STARS SHONE THROUGH SO PLAIN--

JUST FROM WATCHIN' THOSE STARS, I LEARNED--

ANN

(Sings)
YOU LEARNED--?

ABE

THAT A ROOF THAT LETS IN STARS
WON'T KEEP OUT THE RAIN!

ANN

It all sounds so fine! Why ever did you leave?

ABE

Well, Miss Rutledge, you might say a snake reared up its head
in the Garden of Eden--

ANN

A snake?

ABE

A book. Then two books. Then more. Tellin' me things I didn't know before.

ANN

Such as?

ABE

(Sings)

PAST THE HILLS
AND ACROSS THE WOODS
WAS A GREAT BIG PLACE OUTSIDE--

CROWDED AND BUSY
DIFF'RENT AND STRANGE--
TALLER THAN HEAVEN AND TWICE
AS
WIDE--

SO I CAME TO KNOW
THERE WAS MORE TO THE WORLD
THAN HARDIN COUNTY, KENTUCKY--

AND I NEVER BEEN--

MENTOR

(Absently)

YOU HAVEN'T BEEN--

ABE

(After mulling that)

I HAVEN'T BEEN
THE SAME ABE LINCOLN
SINCE!

ANN and JIM leave. ABE hauls up on
of the bales, starts to leave with
MENTOR.

ABE

Tell me about "haven't been"--

MENTOR

Well, Abe, in that phrase, "haven't" is the negative form of
an auxiliary verb used with a past participle--

And they are off as the lights fade.

Scene Three

A SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE RUTLEDGE
TAVERN, AUTUMN, 1831.

A bar, tables, chairs, fireplace.
The atmosphere is simple, almost
primitive, but some bright curtains
and tablecloths cheer it up.

ANN is alone, sewing, humming to
herself. JIM enters.

JIM

Everything ready for tonight, Ann?

ANN

Yes, Pa.

JIM

I must be gettin' old. I dread these Saturday nights. All
the drinkin', fightin'--like wolves, some of 'em.

ANN

But we do more business on a Saturday night than the rest of
the week put together.

JIM

You're right. You're a sensible girl. You'll be a sensible
wife, too. (A pause) Any word from--

ANN

(Quickly)

No, but I'm sure there will be soon.

ABE enters unseen, listens.

JIM

(Gently)

They're sayin' his name isn't McNeil at all, honey, but
MacNamar. That he's a drifter--a womanizer--

ANN

(Unhappy)

Oh, Pa--

JIM

Now, now. I ain't sayin' it's true. (ABE comes forward)
Evenin', Abe.

ABE

Hello, Jim. Evenin', Ann.

ANN

(Gets up, gathering her sewing)

Abe--

ABE

You're not goin'! I came over early, just to watch you sew.

ANN

You're jokin' me, Abe.

ABE

No, it's true. Watchin' those fingers of yours is the most restful--most gentle--prettiest thing I ever seen--I mean, saw.

JIM

(Laughs)

Mentor still fillin' your head with grammar, Abe?

ABE

He's tryin', but like the old lady said--

He stops. They look at him, waiting. He grins sheepishly.

I forget.

ANN

I'm glad you like watchin' me sew. I never knew. You never said.

ABE

I never said--lots o' things.

ANN smiles, flustered, and exits.

I overheard that about McNeil, Jim.

JIM

She's still set on him, but I'm afraid she's in for a long wait. (A pause) Abe--if you'd like to speak up for Ann--it'd go proud with me. (He's embarrassed) Well--we don't have enough firewood for tonight--

JIM leaves. ABE wanders over to where ANN had been sitting, gently running his fingers over the back of the chair. Suddenly, spotting

something on the seat, he picks up her thimble and gently touches it to his lips.

(Sings)

I WATCH HER FINGERS
 THREAD A NEEDLE--
 MAKE HER STITCHES
 SMALL AND FINE--
 AND I WANT TO STOP THEIR FLIGHT
 BY TOUCHING THEM WITH MY OWN--
 BUT INSTEAD I STAMMER A FOOL GOOD NIGHT
 AND ONCE AGAIN I'M ALL
 ALONE--

I'M ALL ALONE TO DREAM
 ABOUT A GIRL LIKE HER
 WHO COULDN'T EVER LOVE
 A MAN LIKE ME--

WHO COULDN'T SEE BEHIND
 THIS FACE THAT MAKES THEM LAUGH,
 AND FIND THE MAN
 I'D LIKE TO BE--

I WOULDN'T DARE TO HOPE
 IN ANY WAKING HOUR
 THAT SHE MIGHT COME TO ME
 AND, WITH A SMILE,

JUST SAY, "I LOVE YOU, ABE"--
 NO, NOT A GIRL LIKE HER--
 AND SO IT'S BACK TO DREAMS
 FOR A LITTLE WHILE.

ANN returns carrying a large tray filled with pewter cups which she transfers to a shelf behind the bar as she talks.

ANN

How're things at the store, Abe?

ABE

Bad to worse--like always. I wish I could think of ways to drum up business. Between Denton's drinkin' and my readin', we'll be bankrupt by Christmas. I'm a terrible businessman, Ann.

ANN

Mrs. Cameron said you walked three miles to her house because you weighed her tea wrong and owed her two more ounces.

ABE

That was just an excuse to get away for a while. It was too pretty a day to be cooped up. So I just left--and walked--and thought--

ANN

About what?

ABE

Oh--where I'm goin'. Or if--

ANN

If?

ABE

Yes. I sometimes think New Salem is the end of the road for me, Ann. That I just don't know enough--that I'm just not smart enough--that--I can admit this to you--maybe I'm just not brave enough to ever get out!

ANN

Is getting out so important?

ABE

(Smiles)

Oh--maybe not. Not if--

ANN

Another if?

ABE

Too many.

JIM (Off)

Ann! Bring out the rest of these cups!

ANN

(Calls)

Yes, Pa. (Taking the tray, she starts to leave, then stops and looks back at ABE) You're a nice man, Abe.

She goes. ABE stares after her, then sings again.

ABE

I WOULDN'T DARE TO HOPE
IN ANY WAKING HOUR
THAT SHE MIGHT COME TO ME
AND, WITH A SMILE,

JUST SAY, "I LOVE YOU, ABE"--
NO, NOT A GIRL LIKE HER--
AND SO IT'S BACK TO DREAMS
FOR A LITTLE WHILE.

As the song ends, the tavern erupts with noise as the patrons burst in, including DENTON OFFUTT, JACK ARMSTRONG, and the Clary's Grove Boys, already quite drunk. ANN returns with more cups, puts them out, and leaves. JIM appears with firewood, then starts tending bar.

JACK

(Suddenly and loudly)

Like the old lady said, "I never saw a tall jackass that wouldn't be short as a skunk if his ears was chopped off!"

(Laughter)

ABE

(Smiling)

Now, hold on, Jack. That old lady's a friend of mine, and I never heard her say that.

JACK

(Facing ABE)

So I'm a liar?

ABE

Well, like the old lady said--

JACK

(Pushes hard with both hands against ABE's chest, sending him tumbling backwards)

You're the old lady! You and me've put this off long enough! Rattle!

ABE reluctantly gets to his feet. Both men slowly face and circle each other. Suddenly they're locked together and the match is on, accompanied by shouts, encouragement, and betting from the onlookers. It's

an even match, but ABE finally pins JACK to the floor and helps JACK up.

JIM

That's it, boys. Abe's the winner. Now, shake hands while I buy everybody one--and I said one--drink.

JACK and ABE shake hands. Grinning, JACK puts his arm around ABE's shoulder. Jugs are passed, cups are filled as DENTON raises his cup solemnly.

DENTON

Gentlemen, I give you--corn!

(Sings)

HERE'S TO THE FARMER AND HERE'S TO THE MILL--
HERE'S TO THE GRINDING AND HERE'S TO THE STILL--
HERE'S TO WHAT MAKES YOU GLAD YOU WERE BORN--
GENTLEMEN, HERE'S TO CORN!

JACK

WHAT'S GROWN SO TALL SINCE THE START O' TIME
AND PERHAPS BACK BEFORE THEN?
WHAT GIVES US FOOD AND MONEY AND LIKKER
AND MAKES US A RACE O'MEN?
WHAT DO WE FEED OUR CATTLE AND HOGS
AND OURSELVES 'TIL THE DAY WE'RE DEAD?
WE CAN LIVE WITHOUT A WOMAN FOR A LITTLE BIT O' TIME
BUT NOTHIN'LL DO INSTEAD
OF CORN!

DENTON

IF YOU'VE EVER HAD CORN MEAL COOKED ALL NIGHT
IN A GREAT BIT IRON POT,
WITH SALT AND SUGAR AND LOTS O' CREAM
'TIL IT'S THICK AND STEAMIN' HOT--
MADE INTO MUSH OR FRITTERS OR BREAD
OR THE WAY WE LIKE IT MOST--
SQUEEZED INTO DRINKIN' THAT'S FIT FOR A KING,
YOU'LL UNDERSTAND OUR TOAST
TO CORN!

ALL

SO HERE'S TO THE SUN AND THE EARTH AND THE RAIN--
HERE'S TO THE GROWIN' AND HERE'S TO THE GRAIN--
HERE'S TO WHAT CHEERS YOU WHEN CARE'S GOT YOU WORN--
GENTLEMEN, HERE'S TO CORN!

DENTON

A RED-HEADED, BLUE-EYED PREACHER MAN
 BY THE NAME O' CYRUS BOLES
 ONCE RODE ALL OVER THE STATE FOR YEARS
 JUST A-SAVIN' PEOPLE'S SOULS--
 HE WAS GOIN' ON NINETY WHEN HE UPPED AND HAD
 HIS VERY FIRST SIP O' CORN--
 THERE MUST'VE BEEN FORTY OR FIFTY
 RED-HEADED, BLUE-EYED BABIES BORN
 THAT YEAR!

JACK

I RECOLLECT A WINTER NIGHT
 IN EIGHTEEN TWENTY-FIVE,
 WHEN JASPER SMITH FELL OFF O' HIS HORSE
 AND SOON WAS FROZE ALIVE--
 THEY DUG HIM OUT THE FOLLOWING SPRING
 AND GOIN' NICE AND SLOW,
 THEY Poured CORN LIKKER STRAIGHT DOWN HIS THROAT--

(Long pause)

JASPER, SAY HELLO
 TO ABE!

JASPER high steps over to ABE,
 elaborately shakes his hand, and
 leads everyone in a spirited dance.
 When it's over--

ALL

WHAT'S GROWN SO TALL SINCE THE START O' TIME
 AND PERHAPS BACK BEFORE THEN?
 WHAT GIVES US FOOD AND MONEY AND LIKKER
 AND MAKES US A RACE O'MEN?
 WHAT DO WE FEED OUR CATTLE AND HOGS
 AND OURSELVES 'TIL THE DAY WE'RE DEAD?
 WE CAN LIVE WITHOUT A WOMAN FOR A LITTLE BIT O' TIME
 BUT NOTHIN'LL DO INSTEAD
 OF CORN!

HERE'S TO THE FARMER AND HERE'S TO THE MILL--
 HERE'S TO THE GRINDING AND HERE'S TO THE STILL--
 HERE'S TO WHAT MAKES YOU GLAD YOU WERE BORN--
 GENTLEMEN--
 GENTLEMEN--
 GENTLEMEN! GENTLEMEN!
 GENTLEMEN, HERE'S TO CORN!

The lights are out.

Scene Four

DENTON OFFUTT'S STORE, WINTER, 1832.

A plain wooden structure, filled with all the goods of a frontier town of the 1830s, including prominently, the pot-bellied stove and the whiskey barrel.

ABE is handing a flat package to MRS. CAMERON, as the two Cameron daughters, giggling, take turns trying on a bonnet before a mirror. JACK ARMSTRONG is waiting with a jug.

ABE

Right with you, Jack. There you are, Mrs. Cameron. Five yards.

MRS. CAMERON

Thank you, Abe. You coming to the Debating Society tomorrow night?

JACK

He sure is! He's gonna make a speech! Been practicin' on me.

ABE

That's right. I've been cuttin' my speech to wherever Jack falls asleep. I've got it down to about eleven seconds now.

1st CAMERON GIRL

Maybe somebody should practice a speech for Ann Rutledge!

2nd CAMERON GIRL

Like, "Oh, Miss Rutledge! I may be skinny as a post and funny lookin' as a mule, but I sure do admire you!"

Both girls burst into more giggles.

MRS. CAMERON

(Shooing them out)

You silly geese! Don't pay them no mind, Abe! Good luck at the debate.

The three exit as ABE takes JACK's jug to the whiskey barrel.

ABE

They're right, Jack. The whole town must be laughin' at me for gawkin' after Ann.

JACK

I don't see Ann laughin'. She likes you. Anyone can see that.

ABE

(Fills jug and hands it to JACK,
who gives him a coin)

If I had any kind of prospects--

JACK

Prospects! Why, you're one of the brainiest men in New Salem!

As JACK talks, ABE begins to empty a small barrel that stands on the counter--two knives, a roll of twine, a pipe, some picture frames, etc.

Ann's pa says you ought to go to Springfield and look around. They even got a library there. Mentor says you could even be a lawyer someday.

ABE

I been thinkin' about that!

JACK

Sure, you could be-- what is all that stuff?

ABE

Oh, I bought this barrel from a fella who was headin' West. Paid him half a dollar. I didn't want it, but to oblige him I-- (He stops as his hand lifts out a small book)

JACK

What's that? A bible?

ABE

(Examines it)

No. It says--it says--"Blackstone's Commentaries on the Laws of England."

JACK

A law book! That's a good one! And just as we was sayin'-- (HE notices ABE's strange expression) What is it?

ABE

I met a lawyer once in Springfield. He said that the one book every law student should read first is--is--(He looks down at the book wonderingly) "Blackstone's Commentaries on the Laws of England."

JACK

Well, when you got a book in your hands, I know it's time to go. See if you can find somethin' in there that'll keep me outta jail. (He goes)

ABE doesn't answer as JACK leaves. He is lost in the book. Leaning against the counter, he turns the pages, stopping here and there. Then he suddenly flings the book across the room.

ABE

Aah, I don't understand it! I don't understand any of it! What kind of rot foolishness am I thinkin? I don't know anything! I'm just a--a mess of questions without answers!

(Sings)

WHO ARE YOU?
WHERE DID YOU COME FROM?
WHAT WAS IT MADE YOU
WHAT YOU ARE?
WHO ARE YOU?
WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
IS IT FAR?

WHY ARE YOU?
WHY WERE YOU GIVEN
BODY AND MIND
TO ASK YOURSELF
WHAT YOU ARE?
IS THERE AN ANSWER
ON SOME SHELF?

WHAT GIVES A LIFE ITS SHAPE?
WHAT GIVES A LIFE ITS SIZE?
OR DOES IT ONLY LIVE AT ALL
IN SOMEONE ELSE'S EYES?

WHO ARE YOU?
WHAT IS A PERSON?
WHAT IS A HEARTBEAT?
WHAT'S A STAR?
IF YOU CAN,
TELL ME WHAT MAN YOU ARE!

(To the music of HARDIN COUNTY, KENTUCKY)
 ALL THAT I REALLY
 KNOW FOR SURE
 IS A NAME AND A DATE THAT'S MINE:
 ABRAHAM LINCOLN,
 FEBRUARY TWELFTH,
 IN THE YEAR OF OUR GOOD LORD
 EIGHTEEN NINE--

THAT DAY
 AND THAT YEAR
 AND THAT SQUALLING BIRTH
 WERE IN HARDIN COUNTY, KENTUCKY--
 AND I NEVER BEEN
 (Correcting himself)
 I HAVEN'T BEEN
 SURE OF ANYTHING
 SINCE!

No, that's not true--there are some things I'm sure of. Not many--but some--

(Sings)

MY MA WAS NANCY
 AND PA IS TOM--
 HARDIN COUNTY
 IS WHERE I'M FROM--

MY SISTER DIED
 BUT I DID NOT--
 AND IF THAT MEANS SOMETHING--WHAT?

I GREW UP GOOD--
 AND I GREW UP BAD--
 STRONG AND UGLY
 AND MERRY AND SAD--

I DRIFTED SOME
 AND SAW SOME MORE--
 BUT WHAT WAS THE SEEING FOR?

FROM DAY TO DAY,
 FROM BREATH TO BREATH,
 I LIVE MY LIFE
 BUT THINK ABOUT DEATH--

I TRY TO BE SMART
 BUT I GUESS I'M DUMB,
 FOR OVER AND OVER
 THE QUESTIONS COME--

WHO AM I?
 WHY WAS I GIVEN
 BODY AND MIND
 TO ASK MYSELF
 WHAT I AM?
 IS THERE AN ANSWER
 ON SOME SHELF?

WHAT GIVES A LIFE ITS SHAPE?
 WHAT GIVES A LIFE ITS SIZE?
 OR DOES IT ONLY LIVE AT ALL
 IN SOMEONE ELSE'S EYES?

WHO AM I?
 WHERE AM I GOING?
 WHAT WILL I BE LIKE
 ONCE I'M THERE?
 AND MOST OF ALL,
 WILL ANYONE BESIDE MYSELF
 EVER
 CARE!

Abe retrieves the book and begins reading aloud, concentrating hard.

"The object of law are rights and wrongs." "Rights are either rights of persons or rights of things." "Wrongs are either public or private."

As he reads, he is walking slowly downstage. As he does so, JIM, ANN, MENTOR, MRS. CAMERON and a few other TOWNSPEOPLE, each carrying a wooden chair, enter downstage and seat themselves in two semi-circles, one behind the other. ABE has reached a spot in front of them. Holding the closed book, he speaks to them.

And so, folks--I mean, ladies and gentlemen--I think you'll agree that laws derive their validity from their conformity to the so-called laws of nature or law of God. I hope this argument of mine tonight can stand on its own legs. I thank you.

They applaud, ANN most enthusiastically. After congratulating him, they drift off. ANN and ABE remain alone.

ANN

It was a wonderful speech, Abe!

ABE

I stole most of it from here and there.

ANN

No you didn't! You--you built on some good ideas from the past and--and made them into something of your own!

ABE

(Grinning)

Sounds like I'm not the only one around here been doin' some stealin'.

ANN

(Smiling)

Well--I read, too, you know.

ABE

(Suddenly serious)

Speakin' of stealin', I--I got something that belongs to you. (He takes her thimble from his pocket)

ANN

So that's where-- Oh, Abe, I'm glad you took it!

ABE

No, it was wrong. (He hands it back to her) You're not free, Ann. I've no right to keepsakes. Good night.

He hurries off, leaving her alone.

ANN

You're a funny man, Abe Lincoln. I wish I understood you a little--

(Sings)

HE SITS BESIDE ME
MANY EVENINGS
AND HE UTTERS
NOT A WORD--

WHILE I'M WOND'RING WHAT HE THINKS
AND WISHING THAT I COULD KNOW,
HE SUDDENLY STAMMERS A QUICK GOOD NIGHT,
AND I CAN ONLY
WATCH HIM
GO--

ANN (cont'd)

I'LL NEVER UNDERSTAND
ABOUT A MAN LIKE HIM
AND ALL THAT MAKES HIM BE
THE THINGS HE IS--

AND YET IF I WERE FREE
I JUST MIGHT LET MYSELF
BEGIN TO DREAM
OF BEING HIS--

THERE'S SOMETHING IN HIS EYES
I'VE NEVER SEEN BEFORE
THAT ALMOST FRIGHTENS ME,
YET MAKES ME GLOW--

BUT HE WILL NEVER SPEAK,
NO, NOT A MAN LIKE HIM--
HE'LL NEVER SAY A WORD--
SO I'LL NEVER KNOW.

The lights fade.

No performance or use of this script is allowed without
written authorization from Samuel French, Inc.

Scene Five

VARIOUS PARTS OF NEW SALEM,
SUMMER, 1832.

Lights up on JIM RUTLEDGE, MENTOR
GRAHAM, standing over a seated,
whittling ABE.

ABE

It's a fool idea.

JIM

No it ain't, Abe. There are eleven other fellas in the race
-- and not one of 'em knows as much about New Salem's
problems as you.

ABE

New Salem's only a bitty part of Sangamon County, Jim.

MENTOR

But a typical part--especially when it comes to river
commerce. These towns live or die by how deep a channel is,
or how navigable a stream.

JIM

And by my calculations you've floated boats and cargoes
thousands o' miles! You know more about river navigation
than the other eleven put together! Also, you tell funny
stories and folks like you.

MENTOR

You're ambitious, Abe. You've already set out to become a
lawyer. Why stop there?

ABE stops whittling and looks back
and forth from MENTOR to JIM several
times.

ABE

I got some ideas about the high rate of interest charged on
loans hereabouts. I wouldn't keep quiet about that just to
please the banks.

JIM

Say what you like, Abe.

ABE

(Thoughtful)

They say that once you get bit by that politics bug--

MENTOR

(Laughs)

You're already infected! Your last three speeches at the Debating Society sounded like you were running for president!

ABE

Well--since Denton's place went bust, I'm out of a job anyway. I might as well be an unemployed politician as an unemployed store clerk!

Lights up on another part of the stage, where a crowd of townspeople wait, including ANN, JACK ARMSTRONG, THE CAMERONS, etc. There's a small platform a banner reading "NEW SALEM NEEDS ABE LINCOLN IN VANDALIA!" ABE approaches with MENTOR and JIM. They join crowd, ABE mounts platform. Cheers and encouragement. ABE holds up his hands.

ABE

(Gesturing towards banner)

A fella could take that sign two ways. (Crowd laughs, whistles) Gentlemen and fellow citizens. I presume you all know who I am. I'm humble Abraham Lincoln. I've been--

At this point, a fist fight breaks out in the crowd between two youths. ABE stops speaking, steps off platform, separates youths and tosses them, by the scruffs of their necks, in opposite directions. He then remounts platform and resumes.

As I say, I'm humble Abraham Lincoln. Like the old lady said-- "Political speeches and marriages should be short and sweet." I'm in favor of making the Sangamon River navigable to New Salem. I'm in favor of a state law regulating interest payments. I'm in favor of free education for all. Those are my sentiments and political principles. If elected, I shall be thankful; if not, it will be all the same. I thank you.

Crowd cheers. The lights fade and come up on ABE and ANN downstage. The crowd mills around upstage, tense and waiting.

ANN

I just saw Mentor. He says we'll know soon. Aren't you excited?

ABE

No, just glad it's all over. All those weeks of talkin'! I never want to make another speech in my life.

ANN

You'll have to --when you're living in the capital.

ABE

Better make that "if." It's a mighty long shot.

ANN

(Shakes her head)

No more "if"s. You'll be living there.

ABE

The legislature only meets for a while. Even if I'm elected, New Salem'll still be my home.

ANN

No. You'll stay there. You'll fit right in. New Salem won't be able to hold you once you start meetin' all those lawyers and politicians.

MENTOR enters hurriedly.

MENTOR

Word's in!

The crowd gathers excitedly around him. Cries of "Did Abe win?"

"How'd it go?" etc.

Hold on! Hold on! (to ABE) Sorry, Abe. It looks like you lost. (A groan goes up) County wide, you came in seventh out of twelfth. (More groans--MENTOR holds up his hands) But the news isn't all bad! There were two hundred and eighty votes cast here in New Salem--and Abe got two hundred seventy seven of 'em! (Cheers)

(Sings)

EVEN THOUGH YOU LOST THE ELECTION--
YOU CARRIED OUR NEW SALEM SECTION
BY JUST WHAT A REAL MAJORITY OUGHTTA BE--
TWO HUNDRED SEVENTY SEVEN
TO THREE!

JACK

THERE'LL BE OTHER FIGHTS AND ABE'LL WIN 'EM--
NEXT TIME NO ONE'S GONNA VOTE AGIN 'IM--
NOT EVEN THOSE POLECAT SKUNKS WHO COULDN'T AGREE--
MAKIN' IT TWO HUNDRED SEVENTY SEVEN
TO THREE!

JIM

FIRST THE LEGISLATURE--
 THEN GOVERNOR, THERE'S NO DOUBT--
 WITH TAXPAYER'S MONEY A-ROLLIN' INTO TOWN
 AND NONE OF IT ROLLIN' OUT!

ALL

ABE HAS FRIENDS AND HE'LL NEVER FAIL 'EM!
 THERE'LL BE GOOD JOBS FOR ALL NEW SALEM!

ABE

AND EVEN FOR THOSE MISBEGOTTEN THREE?

ALL

NO! THOSE TWO HUNDRED SEVENTY SEVEN
 WERE ME!
 AND ME--
 AND ME--
 AND ME--
 AND--

And everyone's off into a dance,
 even ABE.

ALL

EVEN THOUGH HE LOST THE ELECTION--
 HE CARRIED OUR NEW SALEM SECTION--
 BY JUST WHAT A REAL MAJORITY OUGHTTA BE--
 TWO HUNDRED SEVENTY SEVEN
 TO THREE!

MRS. CAMERON

(To elderly man)
 GRANDPA, I'M ASHAMED OF YOU!
 THAT WARN'T VERY NICE!

(Explaining to others)
 HE'S TWICE AS OLD AS THE REST OF US,
 AND SO HE VOTED TWICE!

ALL

THERE'LL BE OTHER FIGHTS AND ABE'LL WIN 'EM!
 NEXT TIME NO ONE'LL VOTE AGIN 'IM!
 HE GONNA GET TO BE PRESIDENT 'FORE HE'S DONE
 BY ONE AND ZERO, ZERO, ZERO,
 ZERO, ZERO, ZERO, ZERO--

TEN MILLION PEOPLE
 TO
 NONE!