

**AUTOBIOGRAPHY
OF STEPHEN A.
DOUGLAS**

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Autobiography of Stephen A. Douglas by Frank E. Stevens

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STEPHEN ARNOLD DOUGLAS.

From daguerreotype owned by his son, Hon. Robert M. Douglas.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF STEPHEN A. DOUGLAS.

FRANK E. STEVENS, DIXON, ILL.

While collecting material for a biographical study of Stephen Arnold Douglas, Judge Robert M. Douglas of North Carolina, a son, kindly loaned me this little autobiography. Added to the story as told me personally by the late Colonel John Dement and the sketch published years ago in Harper's Monthly Magazine by Daniel Roberts, we now are enabled for the first time to secure a correct knowledge of the early life of Douglas.

When Stephen A. Douglas kissed his mother good bye at the homestead gate near Canandaigua, New York, her last inquiry was: "And when shall you come home to visit us, my son?" "On my way to Congress, mother," he answered. And so the first visit was to be made ten years afterwards, almost to a day. Douglas started westward determined to make for himself a political career. Just what point he should seek was undetermined; so at Cleveland, he tarried with relatives for the purpose of getting his bearings. With the personal manipulation of those bearings, Douglas had so little to do that it might be said he literally drifted until circumstances, none of them propitious, landed him, sick, footsore from his ten mile walk from Exeter, at the end of a raw day of November, in the little village of Winchester, then in the county of Morgan, in the State of Illinois.

He was so worn by his long sickness that he could scarcely stagger along the road, yet he walked bravely forward with but a shilling in money as the total of his worldly possessions. He presented his boyish but courageous face to the landlord and asked for a credit in board until he could secure pupils enough to warrant his remaining in Winchester. Like the western tavern keeper of his time, that one was charmed by the manly little chap who requested it. He read in his big eyes the

story of an honest purpose, pursued disastrously, yet so valiantly and persistently, that failure could not be possible. The incredible courage of the youngster aroused the sympathy of the village and almost before Douglas went to bed that night 40 pupils had been secured for the little school he desired to teach and from which he hoped to earn money enough to start him in his chosen profession of the law. Had he been permitted to go on to Pekin that environment might not have prevented his subsequent political achievements, but the location certainly would have retarded his progress many years. Jacksonville was the most important city in the state at the time. The ablest lawyers of the state practiced there. It was the pole star among Illinois cities. Everything which had political ambition behind it pointed to Jacksonville. It was the home of Gen. John J. Hardin, said to be the most brilliant and one of the ablest men in the state. To incur his displeasure was regarded by many as political suicide whether the poor victim was of the same political faith or not. When Douglas came to town, Hardin could not bend forward far enough to find the youngster and so the youngster remained unnoticed until the states attorney incident was brought to notice by John Wyatt who had been a member of the eighth General Assembly, 1832-34. The incident excites laughter in Illinois to this very day when related. Douglas weighed but ninety pounds at the time and was only five feet four inches tall, while Wyatt was over six feet, angular, broad-shouldered and naturally when looking down on his companion when with him, he grew to call him "Little Douglas". In manner too, Wyatt was a typical westerner; a Kentuckian, rough and ready, fearless, adroit and possessed of a vocabulary which on occasion would frighten a fish woman. In the ungentle art of tongue lashing, no man in Illinois could face him. This man early became attached to Douglas and ever continued a helpful associate.

Wyatt planned his campaign with military precision and with the genius of a great general. When he knew how the legislature stood politically, he took particular pains to make a street scene and declare his intentions thus: "Wouldn't it be fun to beat Hardin with little Douglas!" Wyatt loaned Douglas a horse. Arrived at Vandalia the state capital, not a room could be found. In despair Wyatt approached Major John Dement then state treasurer, a man of great political weight,



COL. JOHN J. HARDIN.

