

## **LETTER FROM A. LINCOLN TO GOVERNOR WILLIAM H. BISSELL, MARCH 22, 1858**

At the March, 1858 term of the Logan County Circuit Court, two farmers, Samuel Jones (ca. 44) and his son, James (ca. 21), were convicted of larceny and each sentenced to one year in prison. They had been charged with stealing five shoats (hogs less than one year old) having a total value of ten dollars. However, numerous neighbors and fellow citizens of Logan County immediately petitioned to have them pardoned. Samuel Jones was a widower with six daughters at home, all under eighteen!

Judge David Davis wrote to Gov. William H. Bissell, saying, "I tried the case referred to by Mr. Lincoln." "The evidence," explained the Judge, "clearly justified the verdict of the Jury, & there is no legal reason for granting a new trial." Yet Davis thought "that Executive Clemency would not be misplaced."

Ward Hill Lamon, the State's Attorney who prosecuted them, testified to the Governor that the Joneses "still protest that they are innocent." He vouched that a reprieve would "give general satisfaction to the citizens of this county for strange to say, they appear to think that the end of the public justice has been met by the mere conviction without the service." Even the prosecuting witness, A. Larrison, asked for clemency. He admitted "that the ends of the law have already been vindicated."

But Abraham Lincoln's personal petition to the Governor probably made the largest impression. For Lincoln was actually the chief political advisor to Bissell who sat as the State's first Republican Governor. And Illinois' Chief Executive pardoned both of the Joneses on April 20, 1858.

A. Lincoln penned his letter of March 22, 1858, at Lincoln, the countyseat of Logan County. Founded in 1853, it has been named in honor of the tall and honest Circuit Rider who had taught himself law by merely reading the textbooks.

Lincoln's plea has been reproduced here from the original document in the ILLINOIS STATE ARCHIVES and is presented to the public by GEORGE H. RYAN, SECRETARY OF STATE and STATE ARCHIVIST.

Lincoln, March 22-1858

His Excellency

W. H. Bissell

Dear Sir

Samuel Jones and James Jones, at court here last week, were found guilty of stealing five shoats, or small hogs. I have been appealed to, to say something in favor of their being pardoned. They are father and son. I know nothing to say, except that he is an old citizen (I mean the father) and his neighbors appear more anxious that he and his son should be pardoned, than I have known in any other case. This is really all I can say. I was not concerned in the trial; and consequently did not listen to the evidence.

Your Obt. Servt.  
A. Lincoln

Lincoln, [Illinois] March 22, 1858

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