Subj: **Albert White Program Script**
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Albert S. White

[General outline of suggested remarks prepared for Friends of Downtown fund-raiser dinner benefiting Tippecanoe County Historical Association, Dec. 4 and 5, 1998. Performed by Stuart L. Main.]

Not so many years ago, one of your current historians found an occasion to write about me as follows:

Over the years since 1825 Lafayette has produced one presidential candidate, three governors - Frank Hanly, Harry Leslie and Roger Branigin - and two U.S. senators - John Pettit and Albert S. White. Governor Hanly was the Prohibition Party candidate for U.S. President in 1916. But aside from Hanly, none attained such a variety of achievements as a small, frail, bespectacled Eastern gentleman names Albert S. White."

I would humbly plead guilty to most of that description. I tried at all times to be a gentleman about things. I came out to Indiana from the East - Blooming Grove, New York, to be exact - where I came into being in 1803. I am slight of build. I do wear spectacles. I was involved in a variety of enteprises both public and private. I had, I suppose, the same balance of successes and failures as any man of my day.
Over the years I served as president of two railroad companies when they were first building their tracks, and as president of a company that built a bridge over the Wabash River, and as president of a company that built a wooden planked road out to Dayton. I served in both the U.S. House and the U.S. Senate, and some friends and I co-founded the town you know as Stockwell, and a school you don't know, which we called the Stockwell Collegiate Institute.
One winter, when I was very young and new in Indiana, I wrote accounts of the proceedings of the Indiana General Assembly session in 1829 for the old Indianapolis Journal. No other Indiana paper provided that service back then. In 1831 I assisted the Clerk of the Indiana House of Representatives, and in 1833 I was the Clerk. That is how, and where, and when, I made political friends and gained political experiences that gave me advantages later.

My people were English Presbyterians. My White Family forbears first sailed to this country in 1635, and settled in what you know as the town of Weymouth in the state of Massachusetts. My father and grandfather preached a combined total of 100 years to congregations in the same Presbyterian church back there.
Of course there was hope, and pressure within the family, for me to enter the ministry. I inherited some of the necessary "tools," I suppose, in the sense that I gained a good education and developed a convincing speaking style. Preachers certainly need those. But it is fair to say that I was made of different stuff.
In 1822, when I was nineteen, I finished studies at Union College in New York. One of my classmates was Bill Seward. You know him from today's history books as William H. Seward, the New York lawyer who became U.S. Secretary of State in the Lincoln and Andrew Johnson presidencies. Oh, and he's the chap who negotiated this country's purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867. They called it "Seward's Folly." I consider it "Seward's Bargain!"
But I digress. There were friends of our family, church members, neighbors, who were attorneys-at-law, and who encouraged me in that direction. I studied law in Newburg, New York, and secured a license to practice when I was 22. But people were moving West in those days - to Ohio and Indiana - and their stories kept reaching us of the instant successes of so many who were merchants and millers, and physicians and lawyers in the West. I was a young fool at the time, and came out to Rushville, Indiana, at

first. It was difficult, and I moved down to the little town of Paoli. I was one of the few chaps in either town with much education. Because of this I was rather a misfit, yet a person to whom people gravitated for advice, leadership and help. They asked me to give the Fourth of July oration at the courthouse in Rushville in 1826. I wrote out a speech and read it. A newspaper proprietor over in Fayette County - that's Connersville, about a dozen miles away - heard it, liked it, and printed my manuscript verbatim. That was honor enough for a young man, but years later a man said the speech was "a classic and elegant production, abounding in classical allusions, couched in the choicest languate, and could only have been prepared by a scholar of great erudition, one familiar with classic authors." Well, he wasn't there to see it, so take all that praise for what's its' worth!

The town of Lafayette, up above Crawfordsville on the Wabash River, began to get a fair reputation. I heard good things about it in Indianapolis when I was writing about the legislative session. I had no strong ties to Paoli, so when the legislature ended and my work for the Indianapolis Journal was over, I came up here and looked it over and talked to some people and then moved here and opened a law office. That would have been late March, 1829, when I was 25. There was not much to look at here in 1829, a cluster of cabins. My friend Sandford Cox wrote about early Lafayette especially well in later years. Have any of you read his book?

I am guessing here, but I am guessing that I was the first Lafayette citizen to have graduated from a college. I never met another, at least, until a few years later as the town grew. Steamboat traffic, farm products on extremely fertile soil, overland roads, extremely hard work, enterprise, and the willingness to take a chance - those are what made Lafayette grow. It was a mixture of good fortune and hard work. Remember that, always, in your lives today. You are lucky to be living here, but your hard work must blend with your good fortune.

Now I want to be frank. I had but little in common with the grubby, average pioneer of Lafayette. I met Digby, but saw little of him. I doubt that we exchanged more than a "hello" or two in 35 years. Digby lived in his world of mud and river water, and boats and catfish and stinking clothes, and card-playing and whisky drinking and the taking of chances on schemes to make easy money, a rambling life of laughter and belching and morning hangovers.

I was more regulated. I wore a clean, starched shirt and tie, and drew up deeds and wills in an office with smooth handwriting, and kept clean fingernails, and bought books and read them, and cultivated friends in higher places. But in all candor, Digby and I had one thing very much in common, and that was a vision of what could be. Belittle Digby if you will for his social crudities. But credit the man for seeing how this river and this land and this city could thrive. He had that vision, and I certainly had that vision as well.

Like any number of young men, I struggled to find direction. When I was 30 I ran for Congress on the Whig ticket - another thing I inherited from my Eastern Whig Presbyterian ancestors. A loud fellow from down in Covington, Ed Hannegan, beat me in that election. Even beat me here in Tippecanoe County by three votes. And I left that experience with a certain amount of bitterness that remains with me today. And I want to tell you why, so that the next time you vote, you may recall some of tonight's advice from Albert White. I offered the voters education, culture and experience, qualities that I believed needed to be inherent in the successful man, certainly in the successful congressman. Ed Hannegan offered jokes, entertainment, color, eloquence on the stump. Why do these traits continue, in election after election to this very election year, to carry the day? It is America's shame, and may lead to America's ruin.

I stayed in politics for a while, with my painfully burnt fingers, in advisory and behind-the-scenes roles. Then in 1836 the Whigs picked me as one of the state's presidential electors in support of William Henry Harrison. The next year, when I campaigned against slavery - another inherited trait from my forbears - I enjoyed a huge election success and went off to Congress in 1837. And then the year after that, a most bizarre thing took place at Indianapolis.

The legislature in those days, not the people, elected Indiana's U.S. senators. Senator John Tipton was going to be leaving office in March, 1839, and the General Assembly gathered in December, 1838, to choose his successor. Governor Noah Noble and Congressmen Tom Blake and Tilgham [pronounced TILL-em] Howard seemed the front-runners for the job. That was the talk. But when the legislators began

voting no man could win a majority. One hundred-fifty legislators cast ballots, and it took 75 votes to elect a senator. To make this long story short, the process lasted for 36 ballots. On the first vote the biggest vote-getter had only 33. For 31 ballots the nearest anyone could come to winning was Blake. He got 68 on the 19th ballot, but that was the extent of his support. Embarrassed by this situation, a number of people approached me about standing in as a compromise candidate that a majority could back. On the 32nd ballot I got two votes, Blake 66, Governor Noble 48. But on the next vote I got 19, Blake fell to 60 and Noble fell to 23. On the 34th ballot, I had 28, Blake 59, Noble was down to six. On the 35th ballot I took the lead with 52 to 49 for Blake. On the 36th ballot, mind you, the legislors gave me 75 votes to 37 for Blake and 30 scattered among five other men, and off I went to the U.S. Senate.

I was 36 at the time. You could call me a Whig conservative, strongly opposed to slavery. When you take stands, you make friends as well as enemies. I made enemies when I opposed annexation of the Texas Territory. I opposed it because at that time it would have extended legalized slavery. I stood just as aggressively in favor of internal improvements, roads, bridges, waterways, in Indiana and all of the nation. I backed the establishment of national banks, and certain tariffs, and I supported the federal goverenment making grants of surplus land to pay for building canals. I helped get such grants to extend the Wabash & Erie Canal from Lafayette on down to Terre Haute and the Ohio River near Evansville.

I left Washington in March, 1845, because I believed I could be more effective here, and indeed there were numerous opportunities to be effective. Stock companies were being formed to build macadamized roads, plank roads, and bridges, and before long, to build railroads as well. These companies needed leadership from men who were intelligent, experienced in legal and legislative affairs, and who knew the ways of the political world.

So for twelve years, between 1847 and 1859, I seemed to be the president of choice among the stockholders and trustees in local companies that built a Wabash River bridge, a couple of toll roads, the Lafayette & Indianapolis Railroad, and local trackage on the Toledo & Wabash Valley Railroad.

Some of your modern-day historians, I notice, have quoted from one of my two essays published side-by-side in the Lafayette Journal newspaper on November 20, 1850. I'm flattered by that. The railroads were coming, promising an immense bounty for little old Lafayette. But, as it is with the ways of the world, there were supporters and foes of the railroad here. In this matter I was anything but a conservative. I simply said this - among many things - in my essay:

The products of our soil and of our labor are our onlly immediate sources of wealth. Railroads are the best medium through which our products are made available to the general use, and convertible into the standards of value. Of what use is our fertile soil, and to what end shall we labor if we remain in our pastoral and primitive seclusion?

The ascent of the steamboat up our river, and the completion of our canal have marked successive eras of improvement in our condition, and if all the world stood still around us, might continue to sustain our growth. But are we content with this? For ourselves and for our children, our ambition as citizens must aim higher. Planted here in the best part of the Mississippi Valley where all the comforts and luxuries of civilized life may be reached in their highest excellence, we should desire to see all our resources unfolded, and our society advance in all its various forms. This will not only increase our wealth, but also will heighten our moral and intellectual condition. In these channels of commerce, arts and manufacture will follow. The world will bring to us its intelligence.

We shall be visited by the best classes of emigrants, and with the increase and improvements of our population schools, lyceums, churches, agricultural and mechanical societies will be instituted and sustained, general intelligence will increase, social intercourse will be refined and promoted.

That is what I wrote in 1850. I ask you only to look about you today, at your great university, your factories, your marvelous resource of human talents, your diversity of faiths and religions and races, and at your cultural opportunities, and to judge whether or not I was right in saying that the world would bring to us its intelligence.

I was never much of what you call today a "front man." I worked quietly and privately in a manner that caused one historian to write that my business ability and devotion to the Lafayette & Indianapolis Railroad's interests were factors in its success even if I perhaps did not get the publicity I deserved." I never needed publicity. Publicity can hurt as much as help when you are trying to make progress. The L& I Railroad named one of its locomotives the "Albert S. White" and displayed my portrait under the headlamp. That was too much publicity for me!

Bob Stockwell, Moses Fowler, Bill Reynolds and a few other friends and I bought land along the L & I route that Reuben Baker had platted and called Baker's Corners. We renamed the place Stockwell, in honor of Bob Stockwell, and started our little collegiate institute there in 1860, and I built a home out there. Further down the line another L & I railroad town took on the name Whitestown. That was named after me, I am told. Again, too much publicity!

But now, painful as it is for me, we must talk about the Civil War. Not all about it, there isn't time for that. By 1860 the Whigs had become the Republicans and in the fall of 1860 when Abraham Lincoln won the presidency, friends insisted that I run for Congress as a Republican. This was for a seat in the U.S. House also coveted by Godlove Orth, also from Lafayette. But Orth had made enemies in that awkward transition from Whig to Republican, and for a while had gotten caught up in the Know-Nothing movement which was against just about everyone.

I won my election. Back in Washington, in early 1861, I asked Abraham Lincoln to appoint one of my good friends as postmaster of Lafayette. Lincoln promised that he would, but then, to my chagrin, changed his mind in favor of Jim Luse, who ran the Lafayette Journal. Jim was a good man for the job, and an effective supporter of Lincoln deserving of a patronage reward. But Lincoln had made a different promise to me. When I went to see him about it, he knew why I was there.

"Before you proceed," Lincoldnsaid, "I want to tell you a story. In one of our large Illinois towns a new hotel opened with a splendid entertainment to a large number of invited guests. Among these came a big, lean man believed to be a guest, and at the table he made tremendous havoc among the viands, eating with a voracity that struck everyone with astonishment. After dinner he approached the landlord and said, 'I was not invited, but was very hungry and came of my own accord. I have nothing with which to pay you for your dinner, and all you can do in this case is to kick me out the door, and I shall be obliged if you do. I shall feel that I have paid the debt. Now White, I promised you that Lafayette appointment. I admit it. But just before I left Springfield an old friend with whom I had often fished and hunted came to see me, and asked him if I could do anything for him. He said there was no office he wanted. But the other day he asked me for the Lafayette post office for some friend of his, and I had to give it to him. You see, White, I admit I promised it to you. But what could I do but give it to him? Now, if you will kick me, I shall feel greatly obliged to you.'

"With that, President Lincoln drew aside his coattail, bent over, and asked for the kick. Just think of it! The President of the United States asking to be kicked!"

But there was little else about which to smile in those days in Washington. Because of my experience in the Senate no doubt, I was given the chairmanship of a special House committee to consider a very volatile issue at the time - "compensated emancipation" - as one way to end slavery. In other words, pay slave owners for setting them free. Our committee reported out a bill that would have appropriated $180 million from the federal treasury to buy freedom for slaves, and another $50 million to aid the freed slaves in setting up separate colonies.

Lincoln, to be truthful, had suggested this approach and supported the bill. But the madness of the Southern people prevented adoption. Had they seen the wisdom in this plan they would have accepted the offer. There would have been no Civil War, and the war devastation that swept across north and south alike, especially the south, would have been avoided. The trouble was that the bill went too far. Beyond emancipation, which many could agree upon, the bill contained a colonization plan, which had far more philosophical and political foes.

As it turned out, of course, there was that awful war, and slaves were set free without a colony or haven to which to build new lives, and without compensation for any of their owners.

Well, you stand up for what you believe in, and you take your chances. I couldn't even get renominated for Congress in 1862, running on the wartime ticket called the Union Party, which was supposed to gather in

all pro-Union Democrats, old Whigs and Republicans alike. Godlove Orth got back into the picture, and won the seat in Congress.

When Orth took office in March, 1863, Lincoln named me a commissioner to adjust the claims of citizens of Minnesota and the Dakota Territory against the federal government for Indian depredations. That was only mildly interesting and only mildly challenging. Then in '64 the president appointed me a U.S. District Court judge for Indiana to replace the late Caleb Smith, who is a notable figure in Indiana history.

I was barely getting organized and gaining experience in that new challenge when my darkness came, on a warm September Sunday afternoon at my home in Stockwell. An L& I special train draped in black brought me here for the funeral. They carved these words on my stone in Greenbush Cemetery:

"In all relations of life, admirable; as a friend, sincere; as a citizen, public spirited; as a lawyer, honest; as a legislator, wise; as a judge, without reproach."

It has been my honor to have served our city back then, and to visit with so many of you tonight. Good night, and may you go on mixing your good fortune with your good labors in the years to come.