"Lincoln Gained Carroll's Support"
Carroll County Times article for 12 October 2008
By Mary Ann Ashcraft

This seems an appropriate time to look at another election or two, ones which took place nearly 150 years ago, the crucial presidential elections of 1860 and 1864. Those were turbulent times, as all of us know, when the southern states were threatening to secede if their states' rights demands weren't recognized by the man entering the White House. Secede they did immediately following the election of Abraham Lincoln, and the stage was set for four years of bitter conflict.

But how did our own Carroll County fit into the election picture during 1860, and then again, what were its feelings in 1864 when the South didn't participate at all in the election? The results in 1860 reveal that Carroll County, as well as our entire state, had a decidedly pro-Southern leaning. Maryland was, after all, a slave-holding state and might possibly have seceded along with its neighbors to the south if Lincoln had not sent in federal troops.

During several contentious conventions in the spring and summer of 1860, the well-established Democratic Party was torn asunder and two separate parties emerged - the "Northern" Democratic candidate was Stephen Douglas of Illinois and the "Southern" Democratic candidate was John Breckinridge of Kentucky. Abraham Lincoln was the choice of the Republican Party, a party which had fielded its first candidate in 1856, so was rather new on the political scene. A fourth party, one advocating compromise, also participated. John Bell of Tennessee was its candidate. Today we hardly remember any of these names except Lincoln's, although the Lincoln-Douglas debates are often mentioned in history courses.
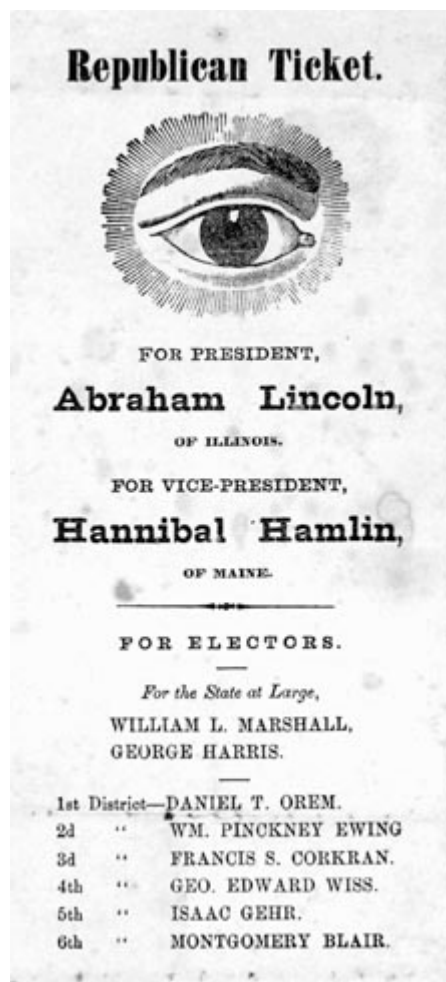
Nationwide, Abraham Lincoln received 39.8% of the popular vote; Douglas received 29.5%; Breckinridge received 18.1% and Bell got 12.6%. Lincoln wasn't even on the ballot in nine southern states. In spite of receiving a large number of popular votes, Douglas didn't receive many electoral votes. Breckinridge carried most of the South plus Maryland and Delaware. Bell carried Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia and Lincoln carried all the northern states plus Oregon and California, easily winning the majority of the electoral votes.

Here in Carroll County, the sentiments expressed that November 6th were decidedly in favor of states' rights or compromise. Roughly 4,500 votes were cast. Fifty-one percent of the voting population favored John Bell's Constitutional Union party; forty percent voted for John Breckinridge, the "Southern" Democrat; eight percent voted for Stephen Douglas, while a mere one percent supported Lincoln. In the Taneytown Election District there was only a single vote cast for the man who has since become one of America's greatest heroes.

Across Maryland in 1860, Lincoln didn't do much better than he did in Carroll County. He received only 2.5% of the popular vote. Douglas garnered 6.4% and Bell and Breckinridge split the remaining 91% of the votes almost evenly. It is little wonder that when the Civil War erupted, Lincoln wasn't sure he could rely upon Maryland to stay in the Union.

In the election of 1864, only two presidential candidates were on the ballot in those states which had remained in the Union; George McClellan ran as the Democrat and Lincoln ran under the banner of the National Union Party. That party ceased to exist after the election and Lincoln has always been considered a Republican.

Carroll County gave Lincoln 52% of its votes in 1864 and McClellan got 48%. Over 70% of the Union soldiers cast their ballots for President Lincoln in spite of the fact that former General George McClellan had been their much-respected Union commander during the early period of the war.

Republican Ticket.

FOR PRESIDENT,

Abraham Lincoln,

OF ILLINOIS.

FOR VICE-PRESIDENT,

Hannibal Hamlin,

OF MAINE.

FOR ELECTORS.

For the State at Large,

WILLIAM L. MARSHALL,
GEORGE HARRIS.

1st District—DANIEL T. OREM.
2d   "   WM. PINCKNEY EWING
3d   "   FRANCIS S. CORKRAN.
4th   "   GEO. EDWARD WISS.
5th   "   ISAAC GEHR.
6th   "   MONTGOMERY BLAIR.

This 1860 handbill promotes the Republican ticket of Abraham Lincoln and Hannibal Hamlin. From the collection of the Historical Society of Carroll County.

Mary Ann Ashcraft is a library volunteer at the Historical Society of Carroll County.