

LINCOLN LORE

No. 94

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

January 26, 1931

LINCOLN LORE

BULLETIN OF
THE LINCOLN
HISTORICAL
RESEARCH
FOUNDATION



ENDOWED BY
THE LINCOLN
NATIONAL LIFE
INSURANCE
COMPANY

Dr. Louis A. Warren - - - Editor

LINCOLN'S ATTITUDE TOWARD CHASE

Further light on the jockeying for positions by the prospective candidates for the presidential nomination of 1864, contributes still more to the magnanimity of Lincoln. The episode revealing Chase and Senator Pomeroy of Kansas, trying to discredit Lincoln is made more interesting by the unpublished correspondence of Secretary Usher now in the archives of the Lincoln Historical Research Foundation.

A few excerpts from these letters show how unconcerned Lincoln seemed to be about the ambitions of his Cabinet members and others. The letters from which these excerpts were taken were written by John P. Usher, Secretary of the Interior, to R. W. Thompson, of Terre Haute.

Washington, D. C., Feby. 17, 1864.

R. W. Thompson, Esq.:

Dear Sir: A secret circular has just been issued signed by Pomeroy, chairman for Chase for President. Mr. C. must have knowledge of and approved it. It contains reflections upon the President of such an offensive character that there will have to be explanations and will, I think, cause a rupture in the Cabinet. There is much caballing and plotting going on here all dangerous to the government and there will have to be explanations. I hope for the peace of the country that our convention will most unanimously declare for Lincoln, by doing that it will tend to suppress some of the malcontents now making mischief. They are looking for the strong side and when they find that Lincoln is to have the further control if it be had at all by a Union man, they will be for him and cease their creating difficulties. I have written fully to Governor Morton maybe he will show you the letter.

Yours truly,
J. P. Usher.

A week later in a letter to Thompson, Usher mentions the Pomeroy circular again and gives us a fine picture of the unconcerned Lincoln.

Department of the Interior,
Washington, D. C., Feby. 25th, 1864.

Hon. R. D. Thompson:

Dear Sir: I suppose you have seen the Pomeroy Circular and have been amazed that Mr. Chase should have allowed such a paper to go to the public. It is a most indecent thing and how a man of strict honor can hold his position as adviser to the President after stating that he disagrees with him in his policy is more than I can tell. Lincoln says but little, finds fault with none and judging from his deportment you would suppose he was as little concerned as anyone about the result. I do not see how we are to keep the family together much longer and you need not be surprised to hear of a disintegration of the Cabinet any day.

Yours truly,
J. P. Usher.

A brief excerpt from a letter written on May 31, 1864, reveals further evidence of unrest in the Cabinet:

I have been in the hopes of seeing you at the convention. Lincoln will be nominated and most of the disappointed will support him. His opposition has come from the Treasury Department. The truth has been withheld and falsehoods have been told by men in pay of that department. It will be known some day how perfidiously he has been treated.

Yours truly,
J. P. Usher.

The climax of the Chase episode as revealed in the Usher correspondence is set forth in a letter written on July 5, 1864, when he speaks of Chase's retirement and Fessenden's appointment.

Department of the Interior,
Washington, D. C., July 5, 1864.

R. W. Thompson, Esq.:

Dear Sir: Yours of the 29th received yesterday. At the date of your writing you were not aware of the contemplated retirement from the Treasury of Mr. Chase. I was confident that the event would sooner or later take place, but was not anticipating it at this time, not before Sept. There has been a bad state of feeling for a long time, and since the Pomeroy circular no attempt at concealment. Mr. C. has rarely attended Cabinet meetings and has been apparently greatly disgusted at everybody. The immediate pretext (it is said on the street) for his resignation was the refusal of the President to appoint Mr. M. Field,¹ assistant treasurer at New York. This

was opposed by Senator Morgan.² Field was a clerk of Cisco and an excellent one, too, as I suppose, but of no political significance whatever. The President had obliged Mr. C. by making him Asst. Secy. of the Treasury but was not willing to go further for him. I do not know how this is, but am well pleased with the change of Mr. Fessenden for him, I think most fortunate for the country as I have no doubt you will be of the same opinion. The agencies of the treasury have conferred upon such a set of graceless scamps and a great improvement in that particular may be expected. . . .

Yours truly,
J. P. Usher.

(1) Mansfield Broadhurst Field.
(2) Edwin Dennison Morgan, Senator from New York, 1863-1869.

The attitude of Chase toward the Amnesty Proclamation serves as a sequel to the disappointment of the man who aspired to the presidency, and his behavior in respect to this action of the administration is set forth in this last exhibit.

Washington,
August 14th, 1864.

R. W. Thompson, Esq.:

There are many discouraging circumstances daily occurring among the less the Wade and Davis protest. I do not think it will do any harm but it shows a dissatisfaction much to be regretted and that these men are indifferent about the future so that they can gratify their malignity by fault finding. Lincoln has to the neglect of his true friends tried to propitiate and oblige this class of men and they will never be satisfied. Of all the acts of his administration they had the least cause and reason to assail him. Every member of the Cabinet heartily approved of the amnesty proclamation with the exception of Mr. Chase and he has had only one objection which was it did not allow negroes to vote but said that he was in the main so well satisfied with it that he would take no exception to it. . . .

So much of the paper "to all whom it may concern" the expression concerning the abolition of slavery was not the ultimatum of the President but inserted because Greeley had intimated that it should be one of the conditions and as he was engineering that case it was put in, but nothing can be done apparently to please these men. I will be home and we will talk the whole matter over.

Truly yours,
J. P. Usher.