

LINCOLN LORE

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THE CAUTIOUS LINCOLN

When the Lincoln of 1860 was caricatured by Currier and Ives with his lips padlocked, the cartoon was in harmony with the general attitude of caution which he practiced at all times, but especially between his nomination and election to the presidency.

The letter accepting the nomination was written under the promise to Mr. Ashmun that its contents should not be revealed to any one except the chairman himself. This promise prevented Hamlin, his running mate on the ticket, who had asked for a copy, from receiving one, and Lincoln even went so far as to advise Mr. Trumbull that "Perhaps it would be best for Mr. Hamlin and yourself not to communicate the fact that the letter of acceptance is already written."

An unpublished letter written by Lincoln during this silent period, and now in the archives of the Lincoln Historical Research Foundation, is one of the best illustrations of his attempt to guard against possible mistakes which might injure his chances for election. Just before the salutation of the letter he placed the word "Private"; in the body of the letter he wrote, "Of course, due caution and circumspection will be used," and as postscript he inscribed the words, "Burn this!"

On May 30 he had written to Leonard Sweet and his concluding paragraph was, "Burn this; not that there is anything wrong in it, but because it is best not to be known that I wrote at all."

Another letter to Sweet on July 16 written a week after the letter to Thompson, says: "When you write to Mr. Casey suggest to him that great caution and delicacy of action is necessary in that matter."

It may be that that matter which needed some delicacy in approach was the same matter referred to in the Thompson letter in which Lincoln advised Thompson that "with reference to the same matter of which you write I wish you would watch Chicago a little." Something was scheduled there for July 17 and Lincoln felt John Wilson could fix the matter.

UNPUBLISHED LETTER Private

Hon. R. W. Thompson:

Dear Sir:

Yours of the 6th is received, and for which I thank you. I write this to acknowledge the receipt of it, and to say I take time (only a little) before answering the main matter.

If my RECORD would HURT any, there is no hope that it will be overlooked; so that if friends can help any with it, they may as well do so. Of course, due caution and circumspection will be used.

With reference to the same matter of which you write, I wish that you would watch Chicago a little. They are getting up a movement for the 17th Inst. I believe a line from you to John Wilson, late of the Genl. Land Office (I guess you know him well) would fix the matter.

When I shall have reflected a little, you will hear from me again.

Yours very truly,

A. Lincoln.

Burn this.

Lincoln's caution was sometimes expressed in denials to statements which would have been detrimental to his candidacy. He was said to have attended a Know-nothing lodge at one time and after advising his friend, Jonas, to the contrary, concludes his letter as follows:

"And now a word of caution. Our adversaries think they can gain a point if they could force me to openly deny the charge, by which some degree of offense would be given to the Americans. For this reason it must not publicly appear that I am paying any attention to the charge."

At one time during the campaign, Lincoln was accused of having spoken

DEDICATION ANNOUNCEMENTS

The date of the dedication of the Library and Museum of the Lincoln Historical Research Foundation is Wednesday, February 11. Two sessions open to the public will be held, the Dedicatory Service at four p. m. and the Lincoln Assembly at eight p. m.

The famous Dicke collection of Lincoln prints, eight hundred in number, will be on display for the first time in the auditorium of the Lincoln National Life Insurance Company building where the exercises will be held.

Guests planning to attend the annual celebration of the Abraham Lincoln Association at Springfield, Illinois, on the following day can occupy a pullman at Fort Wayne on the Wabash Railroad at eleven p. m., arriving in Springfield, without change of cars, at 9:30 a. m. Lincoln's Birthday Reservations should be made at once with the Wabash Railroad as more than one car will likely be needed.

disrespectfully of Thomas Jefferson. In a letter to J. H. Reed, he said:

"I never said anything derogatory of Mr. Jefferson in McDonough County or elsewhere," then concludes by this request, "you may rely on the truth of this, although it is my wish that you do not publish it."

Lincoln's caution is also clearly illustrated by his attitude towards the party platform. On September 22, 1860, he wrote to G. Yoke Tams, placing the usual Private and Confidential before the salutation. He says, "Now if I were to publicly shift the position by adding or subtracting anything, the convention would have the right, and would probably be inclined to displace me as their candidate."

Desiring to again emphasize the private nature of this letter he concludes: "I enjoin that this shall by no means be made public."

A letter to George D. Prentice also inscribed "Private and Confidential," reveals the same caution on the very eve of the election. The editor of the Louisville Journal had suggested that Lincoln write a letter setting forth his conservative views. Lincoln refuses to do this and concludes by saying, "I have bad men to deal with, both North and South; men who are eager for something new upon which to base new misrepresentations; men who would like to frighten me, or at least to fix upon me the character of timidity and cowardice. They would seize upon almost any letter I could write as being an "awful coming down." I intend keeping my eye upon these gentlemen, and to not unnecessarily put any weapons in their hands."

Yours truly,

A. Lincoln.

(The following indorsement appears on the back:)

(Confidential)

"The within letter was written on the day of its date, and on reflection withheld till now. It expresses the views I still entertain."

A. Lincoln.

As the endorsement bears no date it is not known how long he held it after the day of writing October 29, 1860, but it does show his double caution in weighing his words before sending the message out.

Many reasons for Lincoln's election to the presidency have been set forth, and among them one must include his cautious attitude towards every emergency which arose between the eighteenth day of May and the sixth day of November in the year 1860.