

LINCOLN LORE

No. 135

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

November 9, 1931

LINCOLN LORE

BULLETIN OF
THE LINCOLN
HISTORICAL
RESEARCH
FOUNDATION



ENDOWED BY
THE LINCOLN
NATIONAL LIFE
INSURANCE
COMPANY

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LINCOLN'S POLITICAL PARTNERSHIPS

A study of the origin and termination of Lincoln's three law partnerships at Springfield is likely to impress the observer with their political significances rather than their legal aspects. While the many local partnerships which Lincoln made with lawyers in different county seats on the circuit he travelled were formed for the primary reason of building up a clientele, the Springfield associations can be more clearly traced to political expediency. Possibly his connections with Stuart, Logan, and Herndon would be more correctly termed political partnerships.

In an autobiographical sketch written in the third person which Lincoln prepared for Scripps in 1860, he said that after the Black Hawk War, "He studied what he should do—thought of learning the blacksmith trade—thought of trying to study law—rather thought he could not succeed at that without a better education."

It was the encouragement which he received from John T. Stuart that made him decide to develop brain instead of brawn, as is set forth by Lincoln's own words as follows:

"The election of 1834 came, and he was then elected to the legislature by the highest vote cast for any candidate. Major John T. Stuart, then in full practice of the law, was also elected. During the canvass, in a private conversation he encouraged Abraham to study law. After the election he borrowed books of Stuart, took them home with him, and went at it in good earnest. He studied with nobody. He still mixed in the surveying to pay board and clothing bills. When the legislature met, the law-books were dropped, but were taken up again at the end of the session. He was re-elected again in 1836, 1838, and 1840. In the autumn of 1836, he obtained a law license, and on April 15, 1837, removed to Springfield, and commenced the practice—his old friend Stuart taking him into partnership."

John Todd Stuart

One is apt to think of John T. Stuart, senior member of the firm Stuart and Lincoln, as a much older man

than his former apprentice, but such is not the case. Stuart was born near Lexington, Kentucky, on November 10, 1807, just fifteen months before Lincoln's birthday.

Stuart's father was a Presbyterian clergyman who saw to it that his son had a college education, and he was graduated from Centre College in 1826 about the time Lincoln had completed his studies in the pioneer log cabin schools of Indiana.

There is a tendency to draw the conclusion from the superior training of Stuart, and the more distinguished family from which he came that he and Lincoln did not have much in common, but this does not appear to be so.

They were both born in Kentucky, both migrated to Illinois the same year, both were Whigs and interested in politics, both were officers in the Black Hawk War, both served in the Illinois legislature at the same time. One who observed their intimacy said that "socially and politically they seemed inseparable."

Although they had so much in common the one interest above all other which bound them together was politics. One of Stuart's biographies has said that "Stuart's predominating interest was politics." There is no question about Lincoln's chief ambition in life.

Stuart was the first of the Stuart and Lincoln combination to engage Stephen A. Douglas in a political contest, and defeated him in an exciting congressional campaign. Stuart's removal to Washington was largely responsible for the dissolution of this partnership with Lincoln. It might be said that both the beginning and end of the Stuart-Lincoln law firm was due directly to political influences.

Stuart was elected to Congress as a Democrat during Lincoln's administration and served as chairman of the Executive Committee of the National Lincoln Memorial Association organized shortly after Lincoln's death.

Stephen Trigg Logan

Lincoln's second law partner, Stephen T. Logan, was born in Franklin county, Kentucky, February 24, 1800. It will be observed that Logan was only nine years older than Lincoln. When they established their law firm in 1841, Lincoln was thirty-two and Logan, forty-one.

Lincoln already had achieved unusual success in being elected to the Illinois legislature during his early years, and this fact could not have been overlooked by Judge Logan who invited Lincoln to become associated with him. Logan had served as a commonwealth attorney in Kentucky before coming to Illinois and three years

after his arrival in Illinois was elected Judge of the first Judicial Circuit.

It must be more than a coincidence that Logan began his political career as a member of the Illinois legislature at just the time his partner Lincoln decided not to announce for another term.

There have been different reasons set forth for the culmination of this partnership, but disagreement about certain political questions may have played just as important a part as some matters of economic importance which have often been set forth as the reason for dissolution of the partnership.

As a sequel to the several political contacts of Lincoln, it is interesting to note that in 1860, Logan was a delegate at large from the state of Illinois and helped to nominate his former partner to carry the Republican banner in the national contest.

William Henry Herndon

Lincoln's third and last partner who was associated with him for twenty years was born in Kentucky on December 28, 1818, not more than twenty-five miles from where Abraham Lincoln himself was born. So all three of Lincoln's Springfield law partners were Kentuckians like himself and came by their political inheritance naturally.

Herndon admitted that during the early years of his association with Lincoln he was little more than an office clerk, and certainly his inadequate law training would not make him a valuable legal assistant to the firm of Lincoln and Herndon. He was, however, a valuable political ally and it is evidently his efficiency as a political secretary to Lincoln that was responsible for the long partnership.

His letters to Lincoln, and those he received in return, contain mostly references to political matters and very few are concerned with the law practice. We need only to read some of Herndon's own testimony to comprehend the topic which was the chief point of contact between Lincoln and Herndon, and that was politics.

During Lincoln's term as president this relationship still existed and while it is true that the Lincoln and Herndon contacts were maintained until the death of Lincoln it is not difficult to discover the main reason for this long-time partnership.

While it appears that Lincoln's two other partnerships were cut short largely because of political considerations it is likely that this third association was prolonged because of the junior partner's willingness to serve in the capacity of a political secretary for his chief.