

LINCOLN LORE

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HONORABLE HANNIBAL HAMLIN OF HAMDEN

When Honorable Hannibal Hamlin of Hamden, Maine, was elected to the United States Senate in 1848, an old politician remarked, "Why, sir, your name ought to make you president some day." Just how near this prophecy came to being fulfilled may be learned by reading about the last-minute shift from Hamlin to Johnson for vice-president in the Baltimore Convention of 1864.

Upon bringing together the names of Lincoln and Hamlin after the Chicago Convention in 1860, it was found that certain anagrams were easily made from the letters found in the two names. Campaign banners were inscribed with such displays as:

ABRA—HAMLIN—COLN

The opposition parties also utilized an arrangement of the names for their own purpose. The Black Republican Party, as they called it, had as its standard bearer:

HAM—LINCOLN

with special emphasis placed on the name of the Biblical character "Ham."

The First Lincoln Contact

Hamlin's first contact with the family named Lincoln occurred when he was but nine years of age. At this time there came to live in the Hamlin home one Enoch Lincoln, a lawyer from Massachusetts, who for the next five years resided with the Hamlins. Within this period he was elected to Congress and finally to the governorship of the state. Enoch Lincoln in the eyes of the boy, Hannibal, was the ideal statesman; and it was undoubtedly the environmental influence of Enoch Lincoln that started Hamlin out on his political career. Hannibal not only followed his hero to Washington by being elected a representative and thence to the State House as Governor of Maine, but also surpassed his early teacher by being elected to the United States Senate. Enoch Lincoln was a descendant of the same Samuel Lincoln of Hingham, Massachusetts, who was the first American progenitor of President Abraham Lincoln.

First Appraisal of Abraham Lincoln

At Washington in 1848 Senator Hamlin first saw Abraham Lincoln, the lone Whig representative from Illinois, who was to greatly influence his career in later years. Although he never met Lincoln personally, he heard him deliver the famous "coat-tail" speech in the House of Representatives and knew him as "the most striking looking man in Congress."

The Missouri Compromise of 1850 not only awakened Lincoln, but it also caused Hamlin to change his party affiliations and thereafter he worked in the Republican ranks. He was a keen follower of the Lincoln-Douglas debates as reported by the press and was in agreement with Lincoln in all that he set forth.

The Chicago Convention

With the approach of the Chicago Convention Hamlin was often mentioned as a possible candidate for the presidency. This move he discouraged, and he was instrumental in having Maine delegates sent to the Convention unincumbered so that they might throw their power to the man who seemed to be best qualified as a candidate. While Hamlin did not anticipate Lincoln's election, he had said much in favor of him. This quiet campaigning had much to do with the state casting six of her sixteen votes for Lincoln on the first ballot.

Hamlin's nomination as vice-president came as a surprise to him and was largely brought about through the efforts of some of his associates at Washington. On the first ballot he received 194 votes and his nearest opponent, Clay, 101½ votes. On the second ballot his total jumped to 367, and he was nominated.

Correspondence With Lincoln

On July 18, 1860, Abraham Lincoln wrote the following note to Mr. Hamlin: "It appears to me that you and I ought to be acquainted, and accordingly I write this as a sort of introduction of myself to you. You first entered the Senate during the single term I was a member of the House of Representatives, but I have no recollection that we were introduced. I shall be pleased to receive a line from you.

"The prospect of Republican success now appears very flattering, so far as I can perceive. Do you see anything to the contrary?"

Lincoln had heard some discouraging reports about the Maine election and had occasion to write to Mr. Hamlin, on September 4, with reference to the matter. His concluding paragraph follows:

"Such a result as you seem to have predicted in Maine, in your letter to Colfax, would, I fear, put us on the downhill track, lose us the state elections in Pennsylvania and Indiana, and probably ruin us on the main turn in November. You must not allow it."

Hamlin Meets Lincoln

In November, 1860, Hamlin received a letter from Lincoln, asking for a conference with him in Chicago. On November 22 the two men met for the first time in the Tremont House, and on the following day in the home of Judge Ebenezer Peck they talked over affairs relating to their joint administration.

At this time Lincoln invited Mr. Hamlin's opinion on the selection of the cabinet and assured him he would have the privilege of selecting the New England member. On December 4 Mr. Hamlin wrote to Mr. Lincoln making some suggestions for appointments and concluded, "Should not one man, South, of Democratic antecedents, be in your cabinet? I think so."

The Inauguration

When Hamlin journeyed to Washington for the inaugural he had an experience not unlike Lincoln's. His biographer claims that "the only departure made from the original program was taken before passing through Baltimore, when Mr. Hamlin seated himself in another train." He had been advised that it would be unsafe for him to be recognized in the city and therefore changed his schedule. The description of the mob which crowded the station and examined each train presents a picture similar to the one drawn by the biographers of Lincoln.

The inauguration of the vice-president as usual preceded that of the president, upon which Mr. Hamlin immediately called the Senate together for the special session at which the president was inaugurated.

The Baltimore Convention

On June 7, 1864, Ward H. Lamon, attending the Baltimore Convention, sent a telegram to Lincoln advising him that "up to last night Hamlin favorable for vice; now And. Johnson ahead." It is accepted generally that Lincoln desired Hamlin to be his running mate again in the '64 campaign. This wish was reflected in the resolution of Cameron which combined the names of Lincoln and Hamlin, but the motion to sustain it was defeated.

After Hamlin's defeat for the vice-presidency he was appointed to the very lucrative office, "Collector of the Port of Boston." One of the earlier patriots to accept this office was General Benjamin Lincoln of Revolutionary fame. The fact could not have escaped Hamlin's notice, that from his earliest boyhood days the name Lincoln had been a very familiar one in his domestic and public life. Hannibal Hamlin will go down in history as having been linked with Lincoln, in one of the most colorful political contests of all time.