

# LINCOLN LORE

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## PRESIDENTS LIVING WHEN LINCOLN WAS INAUGURATED

Six Presidents of the United States were living in 1861 when the Union was on the verge of collapse. They were: The Eighth President, Van Buren, age 79; the Tenth President, Tyler, age 71; the Thirteenth President, Fillmore, age 61; the Fourteenth President, Pierce, age 57; the Fifteenth President, Buchanan, age 70; and the Sixteenth President, Lincoln, age 52.

It was shortly after Lincoln's inauguration that the country came near having a President's Club. Franklin Pierce wrote to the other former presidents in March, 1861, suggesting that "they get together in Independence Hall, Philadelphia, to try and devise means to avert Civil War." It was in this hall that Abraham Lincoln, a few days previous to this special call by Pierce, had spoken these words:

"I have often inquired of myself what great principle or idea it was that kept this Confederacy so long together. It was not the mere matter of separation of the colonies from the motherland, but that sentiment in the Declaration of Independence which gave liberty not alone to the people of this country, but hope to all the world, for all future time. It was that which gave promise that in due time the weights would be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that all should have an equal chance. This is the sentiment embodied in the Declaration of Independence. Now, my friends, can this country be saved on that basis? If it can, I will consider myself one of the happiest men in the world if I can help to save it. If it cannot be saved upon that principle, it will be truly awful. But if this country cannot be saved without giving up that principle, I was about to say I would rather be assassinated on this spot than surrender it. Now, in my view of the present aspect of affairs, there is no need of such a course; and I may say in advance that there will be no bloodshed unless it is forced upon the government. The government will not use force, unless force is used against it."

President Pierce's proposal for a meeting of the past presidents evidently failed to materialize and an opportunity to organize America's first President's Club went by default. It would have been a short-lived club at the best, as five of the six men eligible for membership were dead within the next eight years. It will be observed that Lincoln was the youngest of the group which may have suggested to the older heads that the youngster might appreciate some fatherly advice.

### THE PRESIDENTS

1782—Martin Van Buren—1862  
Eighth President

Senator in New York Legislature, 1813-1820.  
Attorney General, State of New York, 1815-1819.  
Democratic United States Senator, 1821-1828.  
Governor of New York, 1828-1829.  
Secretary of State in Jackson's Cabinet, 1829-1831.  
Democratic Vice President of United States, 1832-1836.  
Democratic President of United States, 1837-1841.

1790—John Tyler—1862  
Tenth President

Democratic United States Congressman, 1817-1821.  
Governor of Virginia, 1825-1827.  
Democratic United States Senator, 1827-1836.  
Whig Vice President of United States, 1841.  
Whig President of United States, 1841-1845.  
Elected to Confederate Congress, 1861.

1800—Millard Fillmore—1874  
Thirteenth President

Representative in New York Legislature, 1829-1831.  
Whig United States Congressman, 1833-1835, 1837-1843.  
Whig Vice President of United States, 1849.  
Whig President of United States, 1850-1853.

1804—Franklin Pierce—1869  
Fourteenth President

Representative in New Hampshire Legislature, 1829-1833.  
Democratic United States Senator, 1837-1842.  
Democratic President of United States, 1853-1857.

1791—James Buchanan—1868  
Fifteenth President

Representative in Pennsylvania Legislature, 1814-1815.  
Federalist United States Congressman, 1821-1831.  
Minister to Russia, 1832-1834.  
Democratic United States Senator, 1834-1845.  
Secretary of State in Polk's Cabinet, 1845-1849.  
Minister to Great Britain, 1853-1856.  
Democratic President of United States, 1857-1861.

1809—Abraham Lincoln—1865  
Sixteenth President

Representative in Illinois Legislature, 1834-1842.  
Whig United States Congressman, 1847-1848.  
Republican President of United States, 1861-1865.  
Union President of United States, 1865.

This group of six presidents who would save the Union from civil strife were evenly divided as far as political affiliations were concerned; three were Democrats and three had originally been associated with the Whigs. If the incumbent, Lincoln, had not been invited to the contemplated conference, it would have been three Democrats over against two Whigs. It is interesting to note to what extent these presidents participated in the affairs of the government during the trying times through which the country was then passing.

Van Buren lived but a short time after the administration of Lincoln was well under way. He died on July 24, 1862. He had been the anti-slavery candidate for the President in 1848, running on an anti-slavery platform, but was defeated.

John Tyler lived but ten months after Lincoln was inaugurated, but in that brief period he had given unmistakable evidence as to his point of view. He was a delegate to the peace convention in 1861; a delegate to the Confederate Provisional Congress in 1861; and was elected to the Confederate Congress the same year, but died January 24, 1862, before the assembling of the congress at Richmond.

When Lincoln was enroute to Washington for the inaugural in 1861, Fillmore entertained him in his home at Buffalo, and on Sunday, February 17, they attended church together. Although Fillmore was sixty-one years of age when the war began, he commanded a corps of home guards during the war.

Franklin Pierce, in his inaugural address on March 4, 1853, denounced slavery agitation and maintained the constitutionality of slavery. He selected Jefferson Davis as Secretary of War in his cabinet, and Davis served for four years. James Buchanan was made Minister to Great Britain during his administration. Pierce held that "the institution of slavery was embedded in and guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States, and that therefore it was the duty of the National Government to protect it. In the 1860 election he favored Breckinridge over Douglas. On April 21, 1865, he addressed a mass meeting at Concord, New Hampshire, and urged the people to sustain the Government against the Confederacy.

After his successor, Abraham Lincoln, was inaugurated, Buchanan returned to his home at Lancaster, Pennsylvania. He took little active part in national affairs, but supported as a private citizen the maintenance of the war for the preservation of the Union.