

LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor.
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, of Fort Wayne, Indiana.

No. 362

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

March 16, 1936

LINCOLN CHOOSES A FUSION CABINET

The Cabinet which first convened on March 9, 1861, seventy-five years ago this month, represented a fusion of former Whigs and former Democrats. That the responsibility for the selections largely rested upon the shoulders of Abraham Lincoln, the president-elect, must be admitted. Three different influences contributed to Lincoln's final decision as to who should compose his official family: the Chicago Convention selections, the patronage agreements, and the state of the divided country.

Chicago Convention Selections

Possibly William Henry Seward was the first man who was brought before Lincoln as the outstanding candidate for the Republican presidential nomination in 1860. In a letter written on June 1, 1858, nearly two years before the Chicago Convention date, Lincoln said, in reply to inquiries, that he had not been "setting stake against Governor Seward," and further assured the writer: "No combination has been made with me, or proposed to me, in relation to the next presidential candidate." When Lincoln visited New England on a speaking itinerary, in February, 1860, he carefully avoided speaking in Massachusetts which was then strongly behind Seward.

As early as October, 1859, Lincoln had been informed that the State of Pennsylvania was thinking of Simon Cameron as a favorite-son nominee with Lincoln as vice-president on the ticket. On November 1, Lincoln wrote to a Pennsylvania politician discouraging the use of his name in any combination "to the prejudice of all others whose friends respectively may consider them preferable." He also assured his correspondent, however, that he would be for the Cameron-Lincoln combination "if fairly nominated by the Republican National Convention."

These men—Seward, Cameron, and Chase—were the big three among the rival prospective nominees and must have been immediately recognized by Lincoln as most certainly to find a place in the Cabinet of the successful candidate. The first ballot cast by the Convention confirmed his supposition as to their strength. It resulted in 173 votes for Seward, 102 for Lincoln, 50 for Cameron, 49 for Chase, 48 for Bates, 14 for Dayton, 12 for McLean, 10 for Callamer, 3 for Wade, and 1 each for John C. Fremont, Charles Sumner, and John M. Reed.

In Lincoln's correspondence with supporters in Ohio he made it very plain that they should do "no ungenerous thing toward Governor Chase," recalling that Chase was one of the few distinguished men who supported him in 1858.

Lincoln's early speculation about the personnel of his Cabinet took more definite form with his nomination, which resulted from the third ballot; and out of the atmosphere of the Chicago Convention there came the first definite plans for choosing his official associates. Gideon Welles wrote down in his diary Lincoln's own statement of how he attacked the problem. It follows:

"On the day of the Presidential election, the operator of the telegraph in Springfield placed his instrument at my disposal. I was there without leaving after the returns began to come in,

THE FUSION CABINET

Former Whigs	Former Democrats
<i>Executives</i>	
Lincoln	Hamlin
<i>Cabinet Members</i>	
Seward	Chase
Smith	Cameron*
Bates	Blair
	Welles

*Stanton, who succeeded Cameron, was also a former Democrat.

until we had enough to satisfy us how the election had gone. This was about two in the morning of Wednesday. I went home, but not to get much sleep, for I then felt, as I never had before, the responsibility that was upon me. I began at once to feel that I needed support,—others to share with me the burden. This was on Wednesday morning, and before the sun went down I had made up my Cabinet. It was almost the same that I finally appointed. One or two changes were made, and the particular position of one or two was unsettled."

Other men besides the three closest competitors whose names appeared in the balloting at Chicago, and whom Lincoln is known to have considered with some favor in his first tentative list, were Edward Bates, William L. Dayton, Charles Sumner, and Cassius M. Clay. The latter's name appeared on the second ballot.

Patronage Agreements

With the election of Lincoln assured, the problem of patronage was forced to the front. It is difficult to determine just what agreements were made at Chicago in the distribution of patronage. Lincoln is said to have advised his friends that they should make no bargains and that he would be bound by no contracts. It is evident, however, that bargains were made which brought three figures more prominently before Lincoln than before. They were Cameron of Pennsyl-

vania, Blair of Maryland, and Smith of Indiana. These agreements at the Convention undoubtedly influenced the final selections Lincoln was to make and caused him much grief before they were eventually confirmed as *bona fide* members of the Cabinet.

One other question of patronage which also arose was the usual custom of allowing the Vice President to choose a member of the Cabinet. As Lincoln desired that New England should be represented, Hamlin was invited to make that choice. Four names were considered—Gideon Welles, Nathaniel P. Banks, Charles Francis Adams, and Amos Tuck.

Possibly the most significant patronage question to be considered was the sectional appeal. A delegation from California insisted that the far west be represented; and Iowa put in a claim from the middle west. The border states and the south, however, offered the chief problem. Lincoln wrote to John D. Defrees asking if Scott or Stephens would go into the Cabinet; and to Seward the names of Hunt, Gentry, Winter, Davis, and Gilmer were mentioned. On January 12 Lincoln wrote, "I still hope Gilmer will on a fair understanding with us, consent to take a place in the Cabinet."

The State of the Divided Country

More and more, as the inauguration date drew near, the undivided condition of the country began to play a larger factor in the consideration of eligible men, and the plans for a fusion Cabinet of old Whigs and old Democrats became more and more necessary in making the selections. Lincoln wrote Hamlin that he needed a man of "Democratic antecedents in New England." The selection of Blair of Maryland, an old Andrew Jackson Democrat, was also urged. Chase and Cameron, both former Democrats, had already been approached.

In a final analysis it appears that the decision to get the undivided support of the north and some favor from the border states through a fusion Cabinet was the primary factor in the final considerations. Those chosen were: William H. Seward, Secretary of State; Edward Bates, Attorney General; Caleb B. Smith, Secretary of the Interior, all former Whigs; and Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury; Simon Cameron, Secretary of War; Montgomery Blair, Postmaster General; and Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy, all former Democrats. This made it four to three in favor of the Democrats. Lincoln reminded his complaining Whig friends, however, that he was a Whig which would even it up.