

LINCOLN LORE

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

Number 550

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

October 23, 1939

LINCOLN CAMPAIGNS FOR CLAY

Ninety-five years ago at this season Abraham Lincoln, a presidential elector of Illinois, was actively engaged in campaigning for Henry Clay. Lincoln even went into Indiana on a speaking itinerary, thinking that he might help the Whig cause in the community where he lived as a growing boy.

For one quarter of his life Lincoln resided in Spencer county, Indiana, moving there with his parents when he was seven years of age and remaining until he was twenty-one, at which time the family migrated to Illinois. He had not visited his boyhood home for fourteen years until he appeared there as a speaker for Clay.

The Abraham Lincoln who came back to visit his old friends was now a married man with one child and he owned a home in Springfield. Just a month before his visit he had formed a new legal alliance, withdrawing as junior partner of the Logan-Lincoln law firm and becoming the senior member of the Lincoln-Herndon partnership.

Lincoln made several addresses in Indiana, visiting Vincennes, Bruceville, Washington, Rockport, Carter Township, Gentryville, Boonville, and Evansville. On October 30 he spoke in the Spencer County Court House at Rockport, and the local newspaper made favorable mention of his address.

It was at Gentryville, however, that he must have met most of his old friends and among them was William Jones who had greatly influenced Abraham's own political thinking.

The Clay campaign was one of the most unusual political contests in early American history. On one ticket was Clay who probably had a larger personal following than any other man of his day. He was opposed by Polk who had few personal admirers, and also by one other candidate in the field.

It is very difficult in this modern day to appreciate the unusual loyalty which was displayed by the followers of Clay. Lincoln called him "My beau ideal of a statesman," and he found in his old friend William Jones of Gentryville one who was even more enthusiastic about Clay than he was, if that were possible. In *The Evansville Daily Journal* for July 19, 1860 there is a story of Jones' physical collapse after the defeat of Clay which is a good example of the great disappointment which came over so many of the voters.

"William Jones is an old citizen of the county who has taken little active part in politics since the Clay and Polk campaign and who on learning of the defeat of his favorite in that memorable contest was for several days incapacitated for attending to his usual business."

Clay received a great many letters of condolence after his defeat and the excerpts from a few of them which follow will convince one that his power of attraction was unusual indeed, and it is not strange that Lincoln worshipped at his shrine.

"The deplorable result of the late election, has here, as every where, filled the hearts of your Whig friends with pain and mortification, and this feeling has not been con-

finied to the voters only, but has extended itself through all ages, sexes, and conditions, from 'lispering infancy to hoary age'.

"We were not aware, until we saw our anticipations of your success blighted, how strong a hold you had upon our affections, and we now feel that you are President in the hearts of a vast majority of the intelligent and patriotic citizens of the country, where you can never be defeated, and where the poisonous shafts of calumny can never reach you." P. S. Galpin and Others.

"Dear Sir,—My sense of the public calamity has, for some days, absorbed all emotions and affections of a private or personal character. I have been astonished with the result of the elections. The ways of nations, like those of Providence, are sometimes mysterious and inscrutable; and what our country has just done is of this sort." William C. Preston

"My Dear Mr. Clay; my chief, my old master, my venerated and beloved friend!

"... I have received the news, just arrived, of the result of the Presidential election. Great God! is it possible! Have our people given this astonishing, this alarming proof of the madness to which party frenzy can carry them!"

"Again and again, may God bless and preserve you. I write incoherently; you would not believe my emotion. My head is confused." Christopher Hughes.

"It is from the gushing out and fullness of our hearts that we say to you that you have been our political idol, and that we esteem you as highly, and love you as dearly as we ever have done—in defeat, more than in victory—we can not say more, how can we say less?" P. H. Sylvester and Others.

"I well recollect in the family circle while a boy, sitting around the domestic hearth, hearing my father recount your patriotic deeds. One sentence from a speech of yours, 'The colors that float from the mast head should be the credentials of our seamen', was indelibly fixed on my mind. Then judge my deep mortification and disappointment to find the sailors' friend, the master-spirit of the late war, 'the noblest Roman of them all,' rejected by the American people." John H. Westwood.

"Dear Sir,—At the very moment that I learned the disastrous result of the Presidential contest, I determined to write to you; but I soon perceived that I felt too strongly to express myself with any thing like calmness, and on that account I have delayed till now to condole with you on our unexpected misfortune." A. B. Roman.

"I have never before witnessed such disappointment, distress, and disgust. The feeling seemed to pervade all classes. I have heard men of the opposite faction express their regret at the success of their party. A gray-headed man assured me that he could not restrain his tears. My own child wept bitterly." Dr. Mercer.

"With other men, to be defeated was to be forgotten; but with him defeat was but a trifling incident, neither changing him nor the world's estimate of him . . . The spell—the long-enduring spell—with which the souls of men were bound to him is a miracle. Who can compass it?" A. Lincoln.