

# LINCOLN LORE

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## THE LONE WHIG FROM ILLINOIS

During the period in which Abraham Lincoln was coming into political prominence, he was affiliated with the Whigs. As a member of this party he was elected to Congress in 1846. He was the only successful Whig candidate from his state, and his associates soon dubbed him "The Lone Whig from Illinois."

Lincoln witnessed both the rise and fall of the Whigs. In his memorable debate with Douglas at Alton, he said, "I am somewhat acquainted with the old-line Whigs. I was with the old-line Whigs from the origin to the end of that party." On one other occasion he wrote with reference to his early political affiliations, "always a Whig in politics."

### The Beau Ideal Statesman

There is no doubt but that Lincoln was led into the Whig party by Henry Clay and his political philosophy known as The American System. Clay was probably the first Presidential candidate whose name became familiar to Lincoln, as Clay made his first race for the Presidency in 1824 when Lincoln was fifteen years old. In a eulogy at the time of Clay's death, Lincoln said, "There has never been a moment since 1824 till after 1848 when a very large portion of the American people did not cling to him (Clay) with an enthusiastic hope and purpose of still elevating him to the Presidency."

These words of Lincoln which follow indicate his feeling toward the Whig's most persistent statesman: "Henry Clay, my beau ideal of a statesman, the man for whom I fought all my humble life." As early as 1832, when Lincoln was but twenty-three years of age, according to his own testimony he was an "avowed Clay man."

### The Whig Junto

Lincoln as "an avowed Clay man" in the Presidential contest of 1832, the first one in which the new voter was eligible to participate, evolved along with his associates a new political alliance which became known as the Whig party. Lincoln might be called a charter member of the political unit, dubbed locally "The Whig Junto."

The American System promoted by Clay had as one of its most important objectives the protective tariff plank. In a letter which Lincoln wrote in 1860 he said, "In the days of Henry Clay I was a Henry Clay tariff man and my views have undergone no material change upon that subject."

### The Harrison Elector

Lincoln's rapid rise among the Illinois Whigs caused him to be chosen a Presidential elector for Harrison, the Whig candidate in 1840. The first week in February Lincoln wrote a circular to be mailed to all the leading Whigs in the State. He was placed on the State Central Committee with A. G. Henry, R. F. Barrett, E. D. Baker, and J. F. Speed, and a campaign Whig newspaper called *The Old Soldier* was published by this group.

Lincoln's activity in the Harrison campaign is illustrated by a news item in *The Quincy Whig* which states, "Mr. Lincoln, one of the principle electors for the state is 'going it with a perfect rush' in some of the interior counties." He went beyond the "interior counties," extending his itinerary as far south as Shawneetown, Illinois, and even crossing the river into Kentucky where he made a speech at Morganfield.

### Husband of An Ardent Whig

After Abraham Lincoln married Mary Todd on November 4, 1842, he lived in the very Lexington atmosphere of the Clays. Mary's father was one of Henry Clay's closest friends and political associates. As a child Mary was often in the home of the Clays and there was no one outside her own family whom she admired more sincerely than Mr. Clay.

Mary's father, Robert Todd, was one of the leading Whigs of Kentucky. He served as clerk of the House of Representatives in Kentucky for more than twenty years, and later was elected to the Senate. It is doubtful if Henry Clay had a more loyal supporter in Lexington, and Mr. Todd's position financially undoubtedly worked to Clay's advantage.

### The Clay Elector

The 1844 election brought Clay again before the public as a candidate for the Presidency. Lincoln was made a Presidential elector and soon was busily engaged in advancing the interests of Clay. He even went beyond the boundaries of his own state in this campaign, visiting Indiana and making several speeches for Clay near the site of his old home in Spencer County.

During this same period in which Lincoln seemed to be the most active Clay champion in Illinois, his wife's father, Robert Todd, was campaigning for Clay in Kentucky. *The Lexington Observer* noted Robert Todd's activities on behalf of Clay and commented that Senator Todd's arguments "exceeded anything ever heard on the subject."

### The Lone Whig

With four terms in the legislature behind him and two Presidential campaigns in which he had served the Whigs well, Lincoln had ambitions to become the Whig candidate for Congress in 1846 and in August he was elected. The importance of the great state which Lincoln was representing in Washington was impressed on hundreds of delegates from the east by the River and Harbor Convention in Chicago, Illinois. Horace Greeley of New York said it was "the largest meeting ever gathered in America and gave a new picture of the importance of the west." Most of the delegates were Whigs, and warm advocates of Clay's Internal Improvement program.

### The Young Indians

Some time after Lincoln had taken his seat in Congress, he became a member of a group of young congressmen who called themselves the Young Indians. There were originally seven in this Whig group: Stephens and Toombs of Georgia; Preston, Flournoy and Pendleton of Virginia; Lincoln of Illinois and Smith of Connecticut.

This was largely a group of young men with southern interests. Lincoln himself having been born in the South, left only Smith as a representative of the North. The southern Whigs were enthusiastic about the candidacy of Zachary Taylor for the Presidency in 1848 and Lincoln joined in their enthusiasm. Stephenson claimed that the Young Indians organized the Taylor movement. The group, now greatly increased in numbers, sponsored a paper in Washington called *The Battery* which was fashioned after the paper published in Springfield by Lincoln and his associates, called *The Old Soldier*.

In the 1848 Whig convention the names of six of the most influential men in America were placed before the delegates for nomination to the Presidency: General Zachary Taylor, Henry Clay, John M. Clayton, General Winfield Scott, Judge John McLean, and Daniel Webster, yet four years later the party was sick unto death.

### Phoenix-like

One has to pronounce but one slogan, "No extension of slavery," to account for the passing of the Whigs and the transfer of Lincoln's loyalty to the Republicans. The platform of the Whig party in its last campaign in 1852 clearly indicated it would not recognize the rapidly growing sentiment in the North against the enslavement of men. The Whigs boasted that "The Democratic platform in the year 1852 differed in no cardinal principle or essential point from the one adopted by the Whig Party." There was never any need of another Whig platform, and Lincoln, the old-line Whig, arose phoenix-like from the party's ashes.