

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 806

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

September 18, 1944

THE SENIOR PARTNER

One hundred years ago in September, 1844, Abraham Lincoln became the senior partner in a new law firm which he had established, taking in as the junior partner, William H. Herndon. Up to this time he had been associated in two other partnerships, one with John T. Stuart, and another with Stephen T. Logan.

On April 15, 1837, there appeared in the columns of the *Sangamon Journal*, the following announcement:

"The partnership heretofore existing between the undersigned, has been dissolved by mutual consent.—The business will be found in the hands of John T. Stuart.

"John T. Stuart.

"Henry E. Dummer.

"April 12, 1837."

Attorney Dummer, at the time of this announcement, was a practicing lawyer in Beardstown, and it was the place made vacant by him that Abraham Lincoln was invited to occupy.

In the same issue of the *Journal* the following professional card appeared: "JOHN T. STUART and A. LINCOLN. ATTORNEYS and COUNSELLORS AT LAW, will practice conjointly in the Courts of this Judicial Circuit—Office No. 4, Hoffman's Row, up stairs. "Springfield, April 12, 1837."

Hoffman's Row consisting of six two-story brick store buildings, constructed in 1835, occupied an area on Fifth Street, beginning at the northwest corner of Washington and Fifth. The Stuart & Lincoln offices, accordingly, were located in the finest group of new buildings in the city.

One usually gets the impression, inasmuch as Stuart was addressed as major, and referred to by Lincoln as his "old friend," that he must have been much older than Lincoln, but such was not the case. Stuart was born near Lexington, Kentucky, November 10, 1807, so he was but fifteen months older than Lincoln. Both partners were born in Kentucky, both migrated to Illinois the same year, both were Whigs and interested in politics, both were officers in the Black Hawk War, both served in the Illinois legislature at the same time. One who observed their intimacy said that "socially and politically they seemed inseparable."

In the month of May, 1841, the Stuart & Lincoln partnership was dissolved and Lincoln became the junior partner in the firm of Logan & Lincoln. According to the newspaper, their office was on Fifth Street, opposite Hoffman's Row, however, the office was later moved to a building on the southwest corner of Sixth and Adams Streets. This was also a new building, having been constructed in 1841. The post office was located in it, and one of the Logan-Lincoln business cards noted their office was "over the Post-Office, third story."

Logan was also a Kentuckian, nine years Lincoln's senior, and contributed very much to Lincoln's advancement in the practice of law. Both Stuart and Logan were relatives of Mary Todd, with whom Lincoln had been keeping company up until January 1, 1841.

Into the Logan & Lincoln office there had come two young men to study law, one, David Logan, the son of the senior partner, and the other one, William Herndon, a son of one of Lincoln's closest political friends, Archer G. Herndon.

Mr. Logan in reviewing the partnership, stated: "Our law partnership continued perhaps three years. I then told him (Lincoln) that I wished to take in my son David with me who had meanwhile grown up, and Lincoln was perhaps by that time quite willing to begin on his own account. So we talked the matter over and dissolved the partnership amicably and in friendship."

With young Logan going into partnership with his father, naturally it left Lincoln and his protegee, Herndon, thrown together. If it had been any other ambitious young man there at the time, probably he would have been given the same opportunity enjoyed by young Herndon.

One of Lincoln's contemporaries, Harvey L. Ross, has given this version of the forming of the Lincoln & Herndon law firm: "It was thought a little strange at that time that Mr. Lincoln would take into partnership so young and inexperienced a lawyer as Bill Herndon. But he had his reasons and I think I can come very near guessing some of them. Bill's father had been a friend to Lincoln for a great

many years and was a very influential man in Sangamon County. He had always helped Lincoln in every way and it was in payment for this kindness that Lincoln took his son in his office."

Whatever the reason may have been for the forming of the new law firm of Lincoln & Herndon, Lincoln was undoubtedly the senior partner, not only a senior in age by about ten years, but also in experience and ability, by a far more significant gap. The partnership consisted of Mr. Lincoln and "Billy." These were the names by which each addressed the other through the years, and it was so when Lincoln left for Washington in 1861.

Although the Lincoln & Herndon partnership was established in the autumn of 1844, it was not until December 9, 1844, that Herndon was admitted to the bar. The new firm secured offices in the Tinsly building, corner of Sixth and Adams Streets. It was also a new structure, so all of Lincoln's three partnerships were housed in new situations. Some new furniture was acquired for the office and the bill of goods bought to equip the room indicates it was not bare of furnishings.

At some time later, however, the firm moved to the more familiar location, a backroom in a three-story, brick building on the west side of the public square. Mr. Lincoln had business connections with several other lawyers on the Eighth Judiciary Circuit which in many respects were just as important as his Springfield partnership. It might be expected that Herndon, who remained in Springfield and cared for the office there would have the oversight of the routine matters such as keeping the office in a respectable condition. When public attention was called, in 1860, to the apparently neglected condition of the office, the criticism should have been placed where it belonged, on the shoulders of the irresponsible junior partner.

A small wooden sign had been placed at the entrance to the office bearing the inscription, Lincoln & Herndon. It remained there through President Lincoln's administration, and was replaced after his death with the sign Herndon & Zane. Charles S. Zane, who married a niece of Herndon's, then had the honor of being a partner in the once famous law firm, in which Lincoln had been "The Senior Partner."