

LINCOLN LORE

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On Saturday morning, April 13, 1861, James R. Gilmore, a dealer in cotton, was lounging in Willard's Hotel, at Washington, when he met an old friend whom he had not seen for twenty years, Robert J. Walker. Walker, whom it is said was offered a cabinet position by Lincoln, was serving as a special advisor to the Treasury Department. While Gilmore and Walker were engaged in conversation, Simon Cameron, Secretary of War, came into the smoking room and Walker introduced Gilmore to him. When Cameron and Walker learned that Gilmore had recently returned from the South, an appointment was made for him to meet President Lincoln, and review some of the observations which he had been making about conditions in the slave country. That very afternoon Gilmore was introduced to the President and for more than two hours discussed with the President, Walker and Cameron, matters of vital interest in connection with the threatened hostilities. The very next morning news of the firing on Fort Sumter was announced.

The chance meeting of Walker and Gilmore later led to the proposal of establishing a magazine to be managed by Gilmore, with Walker, the political editor, and Charles Godfrey Leland, the literary editor. The magazine was to be called *The Continental Monthly*. Gilmore took Horace Greeley into his confidence and told him about the purpose of the magazine, to publish inside stories of governmental affairs, made possible by Walker's close association with Lincoln, and Oakley Hall's (another collaborator) close friendship with Seward. Gilmore indicated that *The Tribune* might also share in using these firsthand source materials.

It was not until November, 1861, that Gilmore was ready to lay his plans for the magazine before the President and in company with Walker he went to the White House on November 21, for an interview with Mr. Lincoln about the detailed arrangements for putting the magazine on foot. They tried to impress the President that the whole plan had in mind the molding of opinion and the building of sentiment favorable to the Union cause.

It was suggested that Walker might prepare a memorandum for Gilmore to show to Horace Greeley, indicating that Walker would keep Gilmore informed "on all important matters, with liberty to communicate them to Mr. Greeley." Mr. Lincoln agreed to write a letter to Mr. Walker indicating that he was "acting with my approval." Gilmore published what he purports to be a copy of this letter in his book *Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War* (page 54).

In subsequent writings Gilmore makes it plain that the primary objective of the publication was to bring about the emancipation of the slaves and the early issues of the magazine bear out this emphasis.

The initial number of the periodical came from the press in January, 1862, with the following caption head:

THE
CONTINENTAL MONTHLY
Devoted to Literature and National Policy
Vol. 1 January, 1862 No. 1.

The editorial comment in this first issue of the magazine outlines its objective. The editor stated "we shall advocate the holy cause of the Union with might and main, and leave no means whatever neglected to urge the most vigorous prosecution of this war, until the sacred principles of liberty as transmitted to us by our forefathers have been fully recognized and re-established.

Believing in emancipation, subject to the will of the majority and the action of the administration. . . ."

In the very first article in the magazine Mr. Walker puts forth these observations: "We have nothing to do with any issue except how to save the nation. If this shall require the emancipation of every negro in the Southern States, then every negro must be emancipated. . . . Notwithstanding we fight for no other end than to save the Republic, we are absolutely driven into the consideration of the slave question because it involves the very existence of the Republic."

In the section of the magazine called *Editor's Table*, this interesting observation appears. "Five of the present Cabinet, with Secretary Cameron at their head, have expressed themselves fairly and fully in favor of Emancipation,—foreseeing its inevitable realization, and, we presume, the necessity of 'managing' it betimes. Only Messrs. Seward and Bates hang timidly behind, waiting for stronger manifestations, ere they hang out their flags. Meanwhile, from the rural districts of the East and West come thousand-fold indications that the great 'working majority' of Northern freemen—the same who elected Lincoln and urged on the war in thunder-tones and lightning acts—are sternly determined to press the great measure, and purify this country for once and forever of its great bitterness. It is a foregone conclusion."

In subsequent issues of the magazine it is very clear that the editors are driving toward one supreme objective, the preservation of the Union with emancipation as the most important contribution toward that end. After Lincoln had issued the Emancipation Proclamation, Gilmore says in his *Recollections*: "The purpose for which I had established the *Continental Monthly* was accomplished by the issue of the President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. . . . The country thus aroused and the government fully committed to the policy of emancipation, it seemed to me that the magazine had done its work, and could now gracefully withdraw from the arena."

Walker thought the magazine should be continued as a semi-official spokesman for the administration, but it did not show the same vigorous political attitude as before. Both Gilmore and Leland withdrew, and Walker had gone to Europe as the financial agent for the Treasury Department. Walker did not return to the states until November, 1864, and in the December, 1864, issue of the *Continental Monthly* there appeared a long letter from his pen advocating Lincoln's election for the second term. This was one of the outstanding documents of the campaign and the last major contribution which the Lincoln administration magazine made to the conduct of the war and its final consummation. A brief paragraph excerpted from the Walker letter brings this monograph to a conclusion.

"The emancipation policy of the President is not only wise, beneficent, and constitutional, but renders certain the preservation of the Union, while that of his opponents subjects it to imminent peril, I go for the re-election of Mr. Lincoln. I go for him as a Union man, and because his emancipation policy will certainly save the Union; and I go against his opponent, because, however loyal he may be, and however sincere his desire to save the Union, practically he is a disunionist.

". . . Now, with me, in this, as in all preceding elections, the preservation and perpetuation of the Union constituted the great transcendent question, involving the liberty of our country and mankind, and I can give no vote which subjects it to the slightest peril."