

# LINCOLN LORE

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## LINCOLN AND JOHN QUINCY ADAMS

Abraham Lincoln took his seat at the first session of the Thirtieth Congress on December 6, 1847. After the usual roll call John Quincy Adams arose and moved that "the House proceed to the election of a Speaker." Whether or not Lincoln had ever before seen the Sixth President of the United States, now serving in the lower branch of Congress, we do not know, but this was probably his first glimpse of the venerable statesman. Upon the election of Robert C. Winthrop, of Massachusetts, as speaker, Mr. Adams administered the oath to the newly chosen officer.

It is doubtful if there was a single person in the House of Representatives at this time more revered and honored than the aged ex-President now in his eighty-first year. The fact that he was an old line Whig, whose name was second on the Whig roll call, caused his vote to serve as a sort of warning beacon to young congressmen like Lincoln.

It would be of very great interest if we could learn the reaction of Adams to Lincoln's famous "Spot Resolutions" read on the floor of Congress December 22, 1847. We do know they were in agreement on the Mexican War controversy. As early as 1839 Lincoln referred to Adams in a speech before the legislature at Springfield, when Lincoln had occasion to answer some political arguments put forth by Douglas and Lamborn. Lincoln compared the cost of government under Jackson and Van Buren with the John Quincy Adams economy, and made this assertion. "The last year of J. Q. Adams' administration cost, in round numbers, thirteen millions being about one dollar to each soul in the nation . . ."

It must have been pleasing to Lincoln to observe that Adams was taking a deep interest in the slavery controversy. On January 24, 1848 Mr. Adams presented "six memorials of inhabitants of the state of Pennsylvania, praying Congress to take measures for effecting such change in the Constitution and laws as shall abolish slavery throughout the Union in a manner that may be most consistent with justice and the rights and interests of every section of the country." It is apparent from these memorials and others of a like nature which the venerable congressmen presented that he was very active in his capacity as a representative from Massachusetts and became the spokesman for other constituents as well.

On Monday, February 21 while Congress was in session, and immediately after a vote had been taken on a question of military recognition in which both Adams and Lincoln were among those who had voted in the negative, Mr. John Quincy Adams became suddenly very seriously ill in his seat in the House. "On motion of Mr. Cook, the House, at twenty minutes past one o'clock p.m., adjourned until tomorrow at 12 o'clock meridian."

On Thursday, February 24, the speaker announced the death of former President Adams in these words:

"Gentlemen of the House of Representatives of the United States:

"It has been thought fit that the Chair should announce officially to the House an event already known to the members individually, and which has filled all our hearts with sadness.

"A seat on this floor has been vacated, towards which our eyes have been accustomed to turn with no common interest.

"A voice has been hushed for ever in this hall, to which all ears have been wont to listen with profound reverence.

"A venerable form has faded from our sight, around which we have daily clustered with an affectionate regard.

"A name has been stricken from the roll of the living statesmen of our land which has been associated for more than half a century with the highest civil service and the loftiest civil renown.

"On Monday, the 21st instant, John Quincy Adams sunk in his seat, in presence of us all, by a sudden illness, from which he never recovered; and he died in the Speaker's room, at a quarter past 7 o'clock, last evening, with the officers of the House and the delegation of his own Massachusetts around him.

"Whatever advanced age, long experience, great ability, vast learning, accumulated public honors, a spotless private character, and a firm religious faith, could do, to render any one an object of interest, respect, and admiration, they had done for this distinguished person; and interest, respect, and admiration, are but feeble terms to express the feelings with which the members of this House and the people of the country have long regarded him.

"After a life of eighty years, devoted from its earliest maturity to the public service, he has at length gone to his rest. He has been privileged to die at his post; to fall while in the discharge of his duties; to expire beneath the roof of the Capitol; and to have his last scene associated for ever in history with the birthday of that illustrious patriot whose just discernment brought him first into the service of his country. . . ."

After the motions in the House with respect to the wearing the usual badge of mourning, it was "Resolved, that a committee of thirty be appointed to superintend the funeral solemnities." Abraham Lincoln was appointed a member of this committee, although a sub-committee was chosen from the group which did most of the planning, as Lincoln revealed in a letter to Rev. Henry Slicer on June 1, 1848.

At the close of the funeral services on Saturday noon a procession was formed to convey the corpse to the congressional burial ground. The Committee of Arrangements, on which Abraham Lincoln served, marched at the head of the procession, consisting of twenty-seven divisions. The Committee of Arrangements was also directed "to cause to be published 20,000 copies of the addresses made by the speaker and members of this House and of the addresses made in the Senate together with the discourse of the Reverend Mr. Gurley upon the occasion of the death of the honorable John Quincy Adams."

Most of the day following the funeral, the time in the House was utilized by the delivery of many eulogies to the departed Adams, and Lincoln must have been moved by them. The resolution to grant Adams' widow the franking privilege would also be of interest to Lincoln as a member of the Post Office and Post Roads Committee.

On June 20 another resolution relating to the lamented Adams was brought before the House. "Resolved that the Committee on the Library of this House be authorized to procure a monument of Quincy granite, with suitable inscriptions to be erected in the Congressional burying grounds in memory of John Quincy Adams." And still later on March 3, 1849 Mr. Ashmun presented a resolution that a bust of John Quincy Adams, by the artist John C. King, which had been procured by voluntary subscriptions, be placed in the Speaker's room "to mark the spot, and commemorate the circumstances of his death."

While we have no record of any conversation which may have passed between Abraham Lincoln and John Quincy Adams, the fact that both the sixth and the future sixteenth Presidents of the United States were members of the Thirtieth Congress is of interest.