

LINCOLN LORE

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CONGRESSMAN LINCOLN'S COMMITTEE WORK

On the fourth day in which the Thirtieth Congress was in session Abraham Lincoln, the new representative from Illinois, heard his name read as a member of the "Committee on the Post Office and Post Roads." Associated with him in this group were: Coggens, of Virginia, chairman; Root, of Ohio; C. Brown, of Pennsylvania; St. John, of New York; Phelps, of Missouri; Embree, of Indiana; Jones, of Tennessee; and, Kaufman, of Texas.

It will be recalled that Lincoln for a short space of time, about a dozen years before, had been a postmaster at New Salem and this fact may have been responsible for his being named for the postal assignment. Some biographers have referred to the Committee on Post Office and Post Roads as an unimportant appointment, but be that as it may, it was evidently the busiest committee of the session, as far as the number of petitions referred to it are concerned.

It is by virtue of Lincoln's membership on this committee that we are able to present what is likely his first official act in his new capacity as a Congressman. On January 19, 1848, after the House had been in session less than a month, the Journal reveals this entry.

"Mr. Lincoln from the Committee on the Post Office and Post Roads, made a report upon a petition of William Fuller and Orlando Saltmarsh, accompanied by a bill (No. 92) for their relief which bill was read a first and second time, committed to a committee of the Whole House, made the order of the day for tomorrow, and the bill and report ordered to be printed."

The Foundation is fortunate, indeed, to have an original copy of this bill separately printed and it covers two pages. The title caption of the bill appears as follows: Thirtieth Congress—First Session/Report No. 102/(To accompany H. R. No. 92)/House of Representatives/William Fuller and Orlando Saltmarsh/January 19, 1848./Mr. Lincoln, from the Committee on the Post Office and Post/Roads, made the following/Report.

The importance of this bill, inasmuch as it is evidently drawn by Lincoln and also his first piece of government business put in print, seems of sufficient importance to print in full:

"Committee on the Post Offices and Post Roads, to whom was referred the petition of Messrs. Saltmarsh and Fuller, report:

"That, as proved to their satisfaction, the mail routes from Milledgeville to Athens, and from Warrenton to Decatur, in the State of Georgia, (numbered 2366 and 2380,) were let to Reeside & Avery at \$1,300 per annum for the former, and \$1,500 for the latter, for the term of four years, to commence on the 1st day of January, 1835; that, previous to the time for commencing the service, Reeside sold his interest therein to Avery; that, on the 11th of May, 1835, Avery sold the whole to these petitioners, Saltmarsh & Fuller, to take effect from the beginning, January 1, 1835; that, at this time, the Assistant Postmaster General, being called on for that purpose, consented to the transfer of the contracts from Reeside & Avery to these petitioners, and promised to have proper entries of the transfer made on the books of the department, which, however, was neglected to be done; that the petitioners, supposing all was right, in good faith commenced the transportation of the mail on these routes; and, after difficulty arose, still trusting that all would be made right, continued the service till December 1, 1837; that they performed the service to the entire satisfaction of the department, and have never been paid any thing for it except \$_____; that the difficulty occurred as follows: Mr. Barry was Postmaster General at the time of making the contracts and the attempted transfer of them. Mr. Kendall suc-

ceeded Mr. Barry, and finding Reeside apparently in debt to the department, and these contracts still standing in the names of Reeside & Avery, refused to pay for the service under them, otherwise than by credits to Reeside; afterwards, however, he divided the compensation, still crediting one-half to Reeside, and directing the other to be paid to the order of Avery, who disclaimed all right to it. After discontinuing the service, these petitioners, supposing they might have legal redress against Avery, brought suit against him at New Orleans; in which suit they failed, on the ground that Avery had complied with his contract, having done so much towards the transfer as they had accepted and been satisfied with. Still later, the department sued Reeside on his supposed indebtedness, and by a verdict of the jury it was determined that the department was indebted to him in a sum much beyond all the credits given him on the account above stated. Under these circumstances, the committee consider the petitioners clearly entitled to relief, and they report a bill accordingly; lest, however, there should be some mistake as to the amount which they have already received, we so frame it as that, by adjustment at the department, they may be paid so much as remain unpaid for service actually performed by them—not charging them with the credits given to Reeside. The committee think it not improbable that the petitioners purchased the right of Avery to be paid for the service from the first of January, till their purchase in May 11, 1835; but, the evidence on this point being very vague, they forebear to report in favor of allowing it."

"On the morrow," however, Mr. Broadhead announced the death of Hon. John W. Hornbeck, a member of Congress, and the House voted to adjourn to the following day. It was not until the last of May before Lincoln's bill again was considered. When Bill 92 was again ordered to be reported, a week later on June 2 "the bill being engrossed was read a third time and passed." So Lincoln had the satisfaction of seeing the first bill he introduced in Congress meet with approval.

It must have given Mr. Lincoln much pleasure to introduce on January 25, 1848 "a memorial of citizens of Scott County, in the State of Illinois, praying for the establishment of a mail route from St. Louis, in the State of Missouri, to Jacksonville, in the State of Illinois." Another petition which would recall his own service as a postmaster was submitted by him for the citizens of Cass County, Illinois, who petitioned for a "mail route from Virginia in Cass County to Petersburg in Menard County."

Another bill which Mr. Lincoln presented as a member of the Post Office Committee was Bill No. 301, authorizing "postmasters in county seats of justice to receive subscriptions for newspapers and periodicals to be paid through the agency of the Post Office Department."

February 19, 1849 was apparently a busy day for the Whig representative from Illinois as he presented as many as five resolutions. Of special interest was one petition by the Illinois Legislature "in favor of a uniform rate of letter postage of five cents."

The last business which Lincoln had before the House, as a member of the Post Office and Post Roads Committee, was with reference to Bill No. 399 entitled, "An act to define the period of disability imposed upon certain bidders for mail contracts." Mr. Lincoln reported the bill referred to the Senate back to the House without amendment. Mr. Lincoln read the bill for the third time and it was passed. This action was taken three days before the session closed.