

LINCOLN LORE

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CONGRESSMAN LINCOLN OBSERVES CONGRESSMAN JOHNSON

Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson were both members of the Thirtieth Congress which convened on December 6, 1847. For two sessions they were constantly brought together day by day in the assembly room of the House. There has been considerable speculation about how much influence, if any, Lincoln exerted to secure Johnson as his running mate in 1864. Would the behavior of the representative from Tennessee during this congressional period be such as would commend him to Mr. Lincoln as a desirable associate on the Presidential ticket notwithstanding the fact that the President had appointed him war governor of Tennessee?

The first business of the assembly after the roll call was the election of a Speaker and the "lone wolf" tendencies of the Tennessean may have impressed Lincoln thus early in the session. Of the 218 representatives voting for a speaker, Johnson on the first ballot, voted with four other members for McKay and the second ballot he joined with three others in voting for Cobb. The third and last ballot he alone voted for Woodward.

Twelve days after the session began, Lincoln first saw Johnson in action. He entered into a debate on a question which was to become his pet peeve for a month or two. Through a bequest in the will of James Smithson, the United States had received a half a million dollars for the establishment of the institute which was to bear his name. Andrew Johnson had opposed its acceptance because he felt its maintenance would be "an incubus upon the Treasury." He took occasion to ridicule the use of the title "Regent" given its directors, asked what good could result from this institution, and later on presented a resolution calling for a committee to "take into consideration the propriety of so changing and remodelling the present design of the Smithsonian Institute as to convert it into a university."

Both Lincoln and Johnson on Monday, December 20, may have had attention called to each other almost simultaneously as both presented petitions within a few minutes of each other. Lincoln's appeal was on behalf of A. G. Henry of Pekin, Ill., while Johnson's client was Russell Goss. On the following day came the first test vote on a question which was to be pushed to the front many times during the session. It related to the restriction of slavery in the District of Columbia. The balloting proved Lincoln and Johnson on opposite sides of the question and this attitude held good on nearly every subject introduced. On the questions relating to the origin of the Mexican War, internal improvements or any improvements, in fact, the tariff and other legislation, Lincoln and Johnson were invariably in disagreement.

Two government departments came in for severe criticism from Mr. Johnson for asking for appropriations for expansion. His harangue of the clerks in the Pension Office and other government clerks in general whom he designated as a "set of political vampires" was anything but complimentary. Even the providing of additional examiners for the Patent Office where the work was six months behind did not meet with his approval.

On Saturday, April 15, Johnson got into a discussion in which he introduced the subject of the amalgamation of whites and negroes. It became so disgusting that a member of the House arose and objected to the explanations and another member inquired if there was not a special rule "applicable to personal explanation." The reporter of the Congressional Globe stated at the conclusion of Johnson's speech: "Mr. Collamer then claimed the floor and diverted the attention of the House to other business."

On June 20, 1848, a resolution was placed before the House to authorize a committee "to procure a monument

of Quincy granite with suitable inscriptions to be carved and placed in the Congressional burial grounds in memory of John Quincy Adams." It will be remembered that the former President while a member of the Thirtieth Congress was stricken at the Capitol and that Lincoln had been named one of the committee to make funeral arrangements. Andrew Johnson moved the following amendment to the aforesaid resolution "and that the Committee on Accounts be, and they are hereby instructed to report to this House, the entire funeral expenses of the late Hon. John Quincy Adams, and the items composing the same—" In commenting on this resolution Mr. Johnson concluded: "It seemed proof to some extent that something was wanting in the individual when we saw the effort made on the part of legislative bodies to erect spires and monuments to impress the minds of the people." Later on Mr. Johnson again spoke on the Adams memorial project and the reporter for the Congressional Globe states that he "proceeded at some length to oppose the resolution."

An appropriation of \$4,750 for grading and graveling Four-and-a-Half Street from Maryland Ave. to the arsenal also brought forth an objection by Mr. Johnson and which he violently opposed. He questioned the power of the government to make such an appropriation then continued "yet thousands of dollars were spent to lay the dust by sprinkling the street lest it should be offensive to the olfactories of gentlemen."

A resolution was offered which provided for the painting of "the portrait of each of the Presidents of the United States who have been elected since General Washington," the sum total not to exceed ten thousand dollars. The paintings were to be hung in the President's House along with Washington's. In his denunciation of the resolution Johnson was interrupted by the chairman five times to advise him that his "observations were not in order because irrelevant." Johnson finally concluded by moving to "amend the amendment by striking out nine hundred and ninety-nine dollars of the appropriation." The reporter observed: (Several voices: "That leaves just a dollar for the purchase of the portraits.")

At the evening assembly on the last day of session Andrew Johnson again demonstrated an objective attitude which must have placed him in an unfavorable light. Congressman James McDowell of Virginia presented the following resolution: "Resolved: That the thanks of this House are due and are hereby presented to the Honorable Robert C. Winthrop, for the able, impartial, and dignified manner in which he has discharged the duties of Speaker during the present session."

Mr. Johnson of Tennessee moved to amend the resolution by striking out the word "unpartial" and according to the reporter for the Congressional Globe he proceeded "to address the House at length in favor of his amendment." He assailed the administration of the Speaker, especially with reference to "the organization of the committees of the House and to his habitual awards of the floor." The resolution to amend was lost however by a vote 161 to 15. And the original resolution was agreed to.

The editor of Lincoln Lore has carefully searched the records, but without success, for any constructive legislation introduced by Johnson during the session, or any contribution he made which would leave a favorable impression upon Mr. Lincoln while he served with him during the Thirtieth Congress. It must have been in spite of Johnson's very repugnant behavior that Lincoln accepted him as a running mate in 1864 and we can hardly believe he was nominated on Lincoln's recommendation.