

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 863

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

October 22, 1945

PEACE PROBLEMS A CENTURY AGO

A hundred years ago we were at war with Mexico and Abraham Lincoln was a member of Congress during part of the hostilities and also at the time peace was negotiated. Lincoln's "Spot Resolutions" have so overshadowed his other reactions to the Mexican situation that we have failed to appreciate his efforts put forth in the war enterprise.

It was erroneously charged during the Presidential campaign of 1860 that Lincoln withheld his influence and his vote in the attempt to bring the Mexican war to a successful conclusion. Not only do we have testimony to the contrary but his votes have also been recorded on the measures which have to do with the war needs. While he was confident the war was unnecessarily and unconstitutionally commenced by the President it had his sincere and constant support when it was once underway. Lincoln wrote to a friend "While the Whigs condemn the President for beginning the war they consistently vote supplies."

Aside from Lincoln's appointment to the Committee of the Post Office and Post Roads, he was also placed on the Committee on Expenditures in the War Department. With the war already in its second year one can imagine how busy this committee would be in handling war claims and disbursements. That he was an active participant in the work of the committee is evident from the fact that on behalf of the committee he introduced on January 17, 1848, a bill of amendment associated with "an act to raise for a limited time an additional military force and for other purposes."

Four days after the aforesaid resolution was read he presented a petition of Uriah Brown: "Praying for a further testing of his discovery of 'Liquid Fire' to be used in national defense." Still further anxious to make available all necessary equipment for the fighting forces on Monday, April 3, 1848, Mr. Lincoln moved that the rules be suspended for the purpose of proceeding to the consideration of the resolution from the Senate (no. 14) "respecting contracts for hemp for use of the American navy." The vote 81-68 did not give the required two-thirds majority and was lost. On the following June 15, the question came up of providing floating dry docks for the navy yards at Philadelphia, Pensacola, and Kittery. Lincoln cast his vote in favor of the project but there were 48 votes against it.

Evidently the religious body known as the Society of Friends was as active then in advocating peace as it has been in these more recent years. The New England yearly meeting of the organization presented a memorial to Congress on February 10, 1848, for the speedy termination of the war with Mexico. Shortly after this initial move on the part of the Society of Friends, Amos Tuck who later became closely associated with Lincoln presented the following preamble and resolution:

"Whereas, the evils of war, in its consequences upon individuals, and upon the virtue, happiness, and prosperity of nations, have long been acknowledged, and are

now attracting the attention of many humane and enlightened citizens of this and other countries. And whereas, it is the wish of the people of the United States that our government should evince a readiness to encourage all well-directed efforts to preclude the occurrence of war, and to co-operate with other nations in all judicious exertions intended to promote perpetual and universal peace. Therefore:

"Resolved, That it be recommended to the Executive to propose to all governments with whom we maintain diplomatic relations, and with whom we have no such stipulations already, the formation of new treaties, providing in a safe and honorable manner for the settlement, by arbitration and peaceable award, of all disagreements and difficulties that may hereafter arise."

On Thursday, July 6, 1848, President Polk submitted to the Senate and House of Representatives "Copies of a treaty of peace, friendships, limits, and settlements between the United States and the Mexican republic, the ratifications of which were duly exchanged at the city of Queretaro, Mexico, on the 30th of May, 1848".

Every generation is under the impression that the events which it has been able to observe have overshadowed the high points of all past achievements. Such a conclusion may be correctly drawn in a progressive and evolutionary civilization. It is doubtful however, if the present war era, even with its discovery of atomic energy, presents a wider divergence of interest than has occurred between war intervals during the past generations since the beginning of the industrial age. Certainly our provincialism will not blind us to the fact that the next generation will pity us for having lived too soon.

The Mexican War was the climax of an era which is visualized in an address made at the close of the Thirtieth Congress by Robert E. Winslow, Speaker of the House. The close of business came at a night session on March 3, 1849, and after the Speaker thanked the members of the House for the "uniform courtesy and confidence" which had been manifested toward him, he concluded with these interesting observations.

"We have been associated, gentlemen, during a most eventful period in the history of our country, and of the world. It would be difficult to designate another era in the modern annals of mankind, which has been signalized by so rapid a succession of startling political changes.

"Let us rejoice that while the powers of the earth have almost everywhere else been shaken, that, while more than one of the mightiest monarchies and stateliest empires of Europe have tottered, or have fallen, our own American republic has stood firm.

"Let us rejoice at the evidence which has thus been furnished to the friends of liberty throughout the world of the inherent stability of institutions which are founded on the rock of a written constitution and which are sustained by the will of a free and intelligent people."