

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN AND WEBSTER

According to the statement of Jesse W. Weik when Lincoln began his work on the First Inaugural one of the sources which he sent for was "Webster's Reply to Hayne." There has never been any question but what Daniel Webster as an outstanding American statesman greatly influenced Abraham Lincoln, however, there has always been much speculation about how much interest Webster took in his younger contemporary during the short time they were in Congress together.

Lincoln, recently removed to Springfield, Illinois, and had just been admitted to the bar when Daniel Webster visited the West and made a speech at Madison, Indiana. It is almost certain Lincoln read this speech and it is likely that his famous axiom about the security of America, presented in his 1838 Lyceum speech, found root in this statement of Daniel Webster at Madison: "There is no nation on earth powerful enough to accomplish our overthrow. Our destruction, should it come at all, will be from another quarter. From the inattention of the people to the concerns of their government, from their carelessness and negligence I must confess that I do apprehend some danger."

It was not until Lincoln became a member of Congress in 1847 that he met Webster. One author implies that they became very well acquainted and that Lincoln was invited to some of the famous breakfast chats in Webster's home. Still another tradition holds that Webster made some complimentary remarks about Lincoln's ability, as compared to the other new congressmen who had been received into the 30th session of the House. As far as we know however neither one of these conclusions can be verified.

Daniel Webster was born in 1782 and at forty years of age was elected a representative to Congress, five years later he was elevated to the Senate. It will be observed that he was twenty-seven years older than Lincoln, and the lone Whig from Illinois entered the House of Representatives at the age of thirty-eight. It is not likely that the young congressman from Illinois and the sixty-five year old Senator, although members of the same party, would find very much in common that would encourage any close fellowship. It must be admitted that they saw eye-to-eye on all the major problems brought before Congress, including the Mexican War, slavery and tariff and voted almost unanimously with the Whig members in their respective Houses. Webster must have had his attention called to Lincoln's "Spot Resolutions" with which he must have been in full accord.

Also about this time there seemed to be a general movement throughout the country on the part of the younger men to have a voice in the deliberations of the political parties. Herndon's complaint to Lincoln about the younger men being overlooked is illustrative of it. While from Herndon's viewpoint Lincoln was one of the older men, yet in Washington he belonged to the "young" Indians, a group of young men in the Whig party who were largely responsible of bringing about the nomination of Zachary Taylor.

With the casting off of Clay, Webster had his eye on the Presidency, but the young Whigs wanted a man with whom they could win an election. Webster greatly disapproved of the bringing out of Taylor as he did not favor any soldier for President. Inasmuch as Lincoln was very active in securing Taylor's nomination it is not likely that Webster would appreciate the efforts put forth for a candidate which stood in his way of gaining the nomination.

When Lincoln arrived in Washington early in December for the short term of Congress he brought with him the model for a patent he hoped to secure "for lifting boats over sand bars." He is known to have visited the patent attorney Zenas C. Robbins who drew up the papers for him, and his next step would be the presentation of the application to Commissioner of Patents. It was in the process of securing this patent that Lincoln possibly came in contact with Webster for the last time as he was soon to start for his home in Illinois. This incident brings us to the discovery that has suggested this issue of the bulletin.

Early in March, 1946, the editor of Lincoln Lore had the pleasure of addressing some of the members of the Cleveland Lincoln Group at the Western Reserve Historical Society Museum under the sponsorship of the late curator, Dr. Benton. Preliminary to the engagement some little time was available for looking through the Society's manuscripts and it was here that an unpublished and probably wholly unknown letter was discovered written by Daniel Webster to Abraham Lincoln. Although there is no year named in the date line, yet we are quite sure it should be 1849. This is a copy of the letter in question.

"February 28 (1849)

"Mr. Eubank is yet in South. If the inclosed statement of the claim will satisfy our friends I have reason to think a patent may be obtained.

"Yours truly
"Dan'l Webster

"Mr. Lincoln"

Mr. Thomas Eubank was the distinguished Commissioner of Patents and apparently some communication addressed to him had come to the attention of Mr. Webster. Whether or not Webster was serving in any official capacity which would bring Lincoln's patent before him we are not informed, but we do know he was not a member of the Patent Committee in the Senate. There is another possibility that Lincoln may have asked Webster to interview Eubank about securing the patent and the letter was his word in reply.

The sequel to this friendly letter is discovered in the action of the patent office which ten days later, on March 10, 1849, issued a patent to Mr. Lincoln. Possibly when the Lincoln papers in the Library of Congress are opened next year we will hear more about the Webster and Lincoln contacts and especially the reason why Webster should take an interest in Abraham Lincoln's patent.