

# 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 953

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

July 14, 1947

## EDWARD BATES — ATTORNEY GENERAL

The River and Harbor Convention which assembled at Chicago on July 5, 6, and 7, 1847, not only introduced Abraham Lincoln to eastern politicians but it also raised Edward Bates to an exalted position. For the next two decades he was to be known as the outstanding statesman west of the Mississippi River. The sponsor of the convention having lived in Buffalo and Chicago having been selected for the place of meeting it seemed wise to give the western river interests a prominent place in the convention arrangements, and Edward Bates of St. Louis was appointed as its chairman.

It was here that Abraham Lincoln first met Bates and also here that Horace Greeley became impressed with Bates' ability. Possibly Bates' candidacy for the presidential nomination in 1860, supported by Greeley, had its beginning here, and certainly Lincoln's decision to place Bates in the cabinet rested on certain episodes which found their origins at Chicago.

It would seem timely in relation to the series of sketches featuring Lincoln's cabinet members now running in Lincoln Lore to center our interests this month in Edward Bates, who became Lincoln's Attorney General in 1861.

It is not generally known that Bates kept a diary. This literary accomplishment in the Cabinet has usually been associated with Welles. It was not until 1933 that through the sponsorship of the American Historical Society the Government Printing Office brought from the press in one volume *The Diary of Edward Bates 1859-1866* while the Welles three volume work was published in 1911. From this diary edited by Howard K. Beale, most of the information about Bates' selection for the cabinet is found.

President Lincoln planned to visit Mr. Bates at St. Louis on Thursday, December 13, 1860, and sent a message to Bates advising that he would come to see him on the following day to consult with him "about some points connected with the formation of his cabinet." Mr. Bates however, states, "I thought I saw an unfitness in his coming to me, and that I ought to go to him." Accordingly, Mr. Bates made an appointment with Mr. Lincoln for the following Saturday. Two conferences were arranged, one in Lincoln's office in the morning and another in Mr. Bates' room in the afternoon.

Bates in reporting the conference notes, "He (Lincoln) assured me that from the time of his nomination his determination was, in case of success, to invite me into the Cabinet." When the question arose as to which portfolio Bates was to fill it did not seem possible for the President to make any positive assignment but according to Bates' conclusion: "I must be either Secretary of State or Attorney

General." It develops from Bates' notes that he was the only man among many prospects for the Cabinet positions "to whom he (the President) has yet spoken or written a word about their appointment."

**EDWARD BATES**  
Born, Goodland County, Va., Sept. 4, 1793  
Attended Charlotte Hall Academy in Maryland  
Migrated to Missouri at 21 years of age  
Admitted to the bar, 1816  
Member Missouri Constitutional Convention, 1820  
Attorney General of Missouri, 1820-1822  
U. S. District Attorney, 1824-1826  
Served term in Congress beginning 1927  
Defeated as Whig candidate for U. S. Senate, 1828  
Served in Missouri Senate, 1830-1834  
Member Missouri House of Representatives, 1834-1836  
Presided over River-Harbor Convention, 1847  
Judge of Land Court at St. Louis, 1853-1856  
Chairman of last Whig National Convention, 1856  
Candidate for Presidential nomination at Representatives Convention, 1860  
Sworn in as Attorney General of U. S., Mar. 6, 1861  
Submitted resignation as Attorney General, Nov. 24, 1864, to take effect the following Nov. 30

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The question about giving publicity to the appointment was introduced and it was so left that after Bates' return home he could advise Mr. Lin-

coln about the method of procedure. On December 18 Bates wrote Mr. Lincoln that his St. Louis friends thought that his connection with the administration should be made public but that the particular cabinet post need not be mentioned. A letter bearing the same date written by Mr. Lincoln to Bates follows.

(Confidential)

Springfield, Illinois,  
December 18, 1860

My dear Sir: Yours of to-day is just received. Let a little editorial appear in the "Missouri Democrat" in about these words:

"We have the permission of both Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Bates to say that the latter will be offered, and will accept, a place in the new cabinet, subject, of course, to the action of the Senate. It is not yet definitely settled which department will be assigned to Mr. Bates."

Let it go just as above, or with any modifications which may seem proper to you.

Yours very truly,  
A. Lincoln

On December 30 Bates again visited Springfield to confer with the President elect and had a casual meeting with Mr. Lincoln that evening in General Cameron's room at the hotel. The next day during both the morning and the afternoon Bates was in conference with the President elect and returned to St. Louis that night.

Bates arrived in Washington on Thursday, February 28, on March 5th was nominated and confirmed as Attorney General and on March 6th was inducted into office, the oath being administered by Judge Nelson of the Supreme Court.

Bates was the oldest member of the Cabinet and he often referred to himself as an "old Fogey" Whig. One of his biographers states that his "sole reliance in his earthly course were God, the law, and the Constitution." He was consistently conservative in practically all of his observations.

In submitting his resignation to Lincoln on Nov. 24, 1864 he continued: "I gladly seize the occasion to repeat the expression of my gratitude, not only for your good opinion which led to my appointment, but also for your unvarying courtesy and kindness during the whole time we have been associated in the public service."