

# LINCOLN LORE

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## MONTGOMERY BLAIR—POSTMASTER GENERAL

Little attention has been paid in America to the building of family prestige. Possibly the Adamses might offer an exception as the Adams Memorial Society, consisting of thirty-seven descendants of Charles Francis Adams, has done much in creating and sustaining interest in the Adams forebears. In political circles contemporary with the Lincoln administration The Blairs would rank high among important family groups.

When Abraham Lincoln named Montgomery Blair as his postmaster general he was virtually nominating a whole family for a place in his cabinet. The Blair triumvirate consisted of Francis Preston Blair and his two sons, Montgomery and Francis Preston, Jr., or Frank Blair as he was more often called. The partnership of Blair, Blair, and Blair with Montgomery as the spokesman were in such close counsel with the President that at one time they were charged with attempting to direct the affairs of the chief executive. Possibly to stretch the family influence a little, Gustavous Vassar Fox, appointed by Lincoln as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, might be included in the Blair family circle as he was a brother-in-law of Montgomery Blair.

The Blairs usually moved as a political unit; first as Whigs and supporters of Henry Clay; shifting over to Jackson's Democracy upon descending from Clay's views on the U. S. Bank; breaking with the Democrats over the Missouri Compromise; contributing to the formation of the Republican party and later through disagreement in reconstruction plans, swinging back again to the Democratic party.

The senior Blair was a Virginia born Kentuckian who had taken up his residence in Maryland. He was recognized as "the brains of the Jackson Administration" and as such had been highly regarded throughout the South and among Democrats in general. While editor of the "Globe" in Washington, his home, now a government owned structure, was the meeting place of "Jackson's kitchen cabinet."

The junior Blair was born in Lexington, Kentucky and practiced law in Kentucky and Missouri. He became editor of the Missouri Democrat and was elected to Congress as a Republi-

can in 1856. It is claimed that with the opening of hostilities at the beginning of the Civil War that he more than any other single individual "saved Kentucky and Missouri to the Union."

Montgomery, the spokesman for the triumvirate, as far as the Blair

### MONTGOMERY BLAIR

Born, Franklin County, Kentucky,  
May 10, 1813

Graduated at West Point, 1835

Officer in Seminole War

Studied at Transylvania University

Admitted to the Bar, 1839 at St. Louis

Became United States District Attorney for Missouri

Elected Mayor of St. Louis, 1842

Made Judge of the Court of Common Pleas, St. Louis, 1843

Resigned as Judge, 1849

Removed to Maryland in 1852

Appointed U. S. Solicitor in the Court of Claims, 1855

Counsel for plaintiff in "Dred Scott Case", 1859

Presided over Maryland Republican Convention, 1860

Headed Maryland Convention in Chicago in 1860

Appointed to Cabinet on March 5, 1861

Resignation from Cabinet accepted on Sept. 23, 1864

voice in the cabinet could be heard, although the youngest member of Lincoln's official family, possibly had the best formal education of any member. His undergraduate work was taken at West Point and later he entered the Law School of Transylvania University at Lexington, Kentucky, where Henry Clay served as Professor of Law for many years.

The duties of Postmaster General may not have given Montgomery Blair an opportunity to display his real genius. He did inaugurate many constructive policies in the Post Office Department, the fruits of which we enjoy today with little thought of

their originator. The free delivery system, the opportunity to send money through the mail by money order, and the railroad mails originated with Blair. His office was conducted efficiently and with dispatch in a troubled day.

Lincoln did not think of Montgomery Blair, however in the terms of a postal authority but as a tremendous influence along with his father and brother in keeping the border states in the Union. As a citizen of Maryland, with a father born in Virginia, brought up in Kentucky, and now domiciled in Maryland, with a brother born in Kentucky and residing in Missouri, and with his own Kentucky birth and Maryland residence, it is impossible to think of a more typical border state representative.

The fact that the Blairs with such a geographic background were devoted to the Union made Montgomery especially eligible for a place in the official family. There was some thought that upon Cameron's resignation as Secretary of War, Blair might be shifted to this portfolio which more than any other member of the cabinet he was qualified to fill.

The Ft. Sumter episode which found Montgomery almost alone in his attitude toward the wisdom of sending supplies was but the expression of the triumvirate who brought to bear upon Lincoln the necessity of relieving the Fort. The elder Blair had much to do with his son's viewpoint.

The concluding incident associated with Blair's service in the Cabinet was also influenced by the actions of a member of the Blair triumvirate. The attack by the Junior Francis upon Treasurer Chase on the floor of Congress sang the swan song for the Blairs, and although Montgomery's withdrawal was with the kindest of feelings remaining between Lincoln and his Postmaster General, it was typical of the Blairs to pass out of the national picture, fighting.

With due consideration given to all of Lincoln's other cabinet appointments it is doubtful if any nominee, considering both direct and indirect contributions, did more for the successful preservation of the Union, than the Postmaster General.