

LINCOLN LORE

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WILLIAM DENNISON — POSTMASTER GENERAL

Ohio was the only state in the Union which was honored for almost the entire period of Lincoln's administration with two representatives in the Cabinet although for a short period Indiana enjoyed that distinction. Chase of Cincinnati, originally appointed, was soon joined by Stanton of Steubenville and after Chase resigned as Treasurer, Ohio still received recognition by the appointment of William Dennison as Postmaster General. This was the second time Dennison had followed Chase in an official capacity, first he succeeded him as Governor of Ohio and then as an Ohio member of Lincoln's cabinet, but in a different portfolio.

While Lincoln's appointment of Dennison may have been influenced by his place of residence, he was in every respect a capable and efficient executive whose brief incumbency gave little opportunity for him to display his talents. He is better known through his beneficiaries associated with Dennison College, named for him, rather than by his cabinet position.

A son of the proprietor of the famous "Dennison House" at Cincinnati, he was graduated from Miami University in 1835. He married the eldest daughter of William Neil, an honorable and well known mail contractor in stage coach days. Neil could not have anticipated that twenty years later his son-in-law would be the Postmaster General. Upon Dennison's marriage to Miss Neil, he removed to Columbus, Ohio, the home of his bride, and began the practice of law.

Dennison's introduction to politics came in 1844 when he made a speech protesting against both the extension of slavery and the reception of Texas into the Union. Four years later he was elected to the Ohio State Senate as a Whig. Here he distinguished himself by championing the repeal of the law denying the black and mulattoes the "rights of residence."

After but one term in the Legislature he retired from politics to enter business, at the same time Lincoln returned from Congress and decided to give himself more fully to the practice of law. Dennison succeeded in his business career and became president of a Columbus bank and also an Ohio railroad.

Probably it was the same political upheaval that brought Lincoln back into politics which caused Dennison to take an active part in the organization of the Republican party. He was one of the delegates to the preliminary convention at Pittsburgh in 1856 and a member of the committee on reso-

lutions. The significant place which he occupied in the early history of the party is evident from the fact that he was acting chairman of the Ohio delegation at the initial Republican convention held at Philadelphia.

The service which Dennison rendered the Republican party in its organization was recognized by his associates making him the candidate for Governor of Ohio in 1860 to which position he was elected, succeeding Salmon P. Chase. Upon the elevation

WILLIAM DENNISON

Born, Cincinnati, Ohio, Nov. 23, 1815
Graduated Miami University, 1835

Admitted to the Bar, 1840

Made speech against admission of Texas and extension of slavery in 1844

Elected to State Senate as Whig, 1848
On Committee of Resolutions at Preliminary Republican Convention at Pittsburgh, 1856

Acting chairman of Ohio delegation at Philadelphia Convention in 1856

Served as Governor of Ohio, Jan. 9, 1860 to Jan. 13, 1862

Chairman of Union National Convention, 1864

Appointed Postmaster General by Lincoln, Oct. 1864

Serving as Postmaster General at time of Lincoln's death

to the governorship in 1860, Dennison's troubles began and he suffered the fate that almost any other governor-elect in Ohio at this time would have experienced. He was labeled an aristocrat and although of fine business ability he failed to secure the support of the people for lack of experience in politics and his unwillingness to bargain and trade for support and influence.

The chief point of complaint against him was the administration of Camp Dennison where General McClelland was in charge. Reid in his "Ohio in the War" states: "As fast as they were raised, troops were redeployed and turned over to General McClelland and the other United States authorities. For months the people of the State were besieged with complaints as to the mismanagement of this camp, to the great injury of the recruiting service, not less than to the demoralization of the troops already raised. The whole burden of the com-

plaint—for lack of proper food, insufficient arms, tents, clothing, everything—was laid upon Governor Dennison. General McClelland never uttered a word to relieve him of this obloquy, though the entire matter was all the time entirely in his own hands! Much of the complaint was unjust and unreasonable; but it would at least have been considerate, as well as a delicate courtesy to the man who had first appointed him, to have simply borne his own burdens."

It is not known generally that McClelland was first introduced by Governor Dennison, although the story of his appointment is in the same controversial tenor as nearly all the McClelland history. It is well substantiated that it was Dennison who brought McClelland to the attention of the Washington authorities.

When the war broke McClelland, who was a former officer in the regular army, was serving as president of the Ohio and Mississippi R. R. According to some authorities he was proving anything but successful and the fact that he had military training suggested to the owners of the road to recommend him to the governor for a military post. McClelland refused to heed the first call of Gov. Dennison for a conference at Columbus and recommended Captain Pope whom he sent in his place. Finally a conference was arranged and McClelland was given the commission of Major General of Ohio Militia Volunteers.

Dennison then conceived the idea of the elevation of McClelland to the same post in the nation's army and sent the recommendation to Washington in care of Chase asking if McClelland might get a commission with the three year troops as Major General. While Dennison was in Cincinnati in the very room with McClelland and the general's father-in-law, Major Macey, the following telegram was handed to him from Chase, "May 14. We have today had McClelland appointed a Major General in the regular army."

Dennison cooperated heartily with the President in raising troops and the state was credited with 20,751 soldiers above all calls. Although he assumed dictatorial powers there was no question raised about the final auditing of his financial accounts. It was partly in recognition of his valuable service while he was war governor that Lincoln appointed him Postmaster General to succeed Blair, although Dennison's chairmanship of the Baltimore Convention in 1864 may have been a more important consideration.