

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 981

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

January 26, 1948

HUGH McCULLOCH — SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY

Whatever comments may be made about some of Lincoln's other cabinet portfolios being filled with inefficient appointees, no just criticism as far as ability is concerned can be made against any one of the three Secretaries of the Treasury. Hugh McCulloch was probably the best qualified by experience of the three incumbents inasmuch as his efforts were not hampered with personal political ambition. In fact until his chief, Secretary Chase, began to make an active bid for the Presidency in 1864, McCulloch gave very little attention to politics.

McCulloch had been educated for a lawyer and first practiced in Boston, later settling in Madison, Indiana for a brief period and then in Fort Wayne where almost immediately he became cashier and manager of the branch of the state bank at that place. He withdrew from the practice of law and began to make financial affairs his chief point of interest. By 1836 he was appointed a director of the state bank which position he held until the expiration of its charter in 1857.

Mr. McCulloch became more widely known in banking circles in 1857 when he was made president of the new State Bank of Indiana which within a period of seven months had established twenty branches. He then removed to Indianapolis. He was living at Indianapolis at the time of the Battle of Bull Run and made a trip to Washington on financial business. He met Mr. Lincoln on this visit and was not very favorably impressed with him because of his story telling habit.

Two later visits to Washington, one in 1862 and another in 1863, paved the way for McCulloch's first government position. The visit in March, 1863, was more directly responsible for the appointment of McCulloch as Comptroller of the Treasury. The day he was about to leave Washington he was passing through the Treasury Department but as he was not acquainted with Mr. Chase, the Treasurer, McCulloch did nothing more than to leave his card with Mr. Chase's messenger. Apparently Secretary Chase almost immediately tried to get in touch with McCulloch. All telegrams sent did not reach him until he arrived at his home

where he learned that he had been offered the position of Comptroller.

Although the new Comptroller had never met his chief, the Secretary of the Treasury, McCulloch did have Chase pointed out to him at Cincinnati in 1837, the same year that Fessenden first saw Chase. Mr. McCulloch in his first interview with Secre-

HUGH McCULLOCH

Born in Kennebunk, Maine, December 7, 1808

Entered Bowdoin College, 1824

Studied law in Boston

Licensed to practice law in Indiana, May 3, 1833

Elected judge of Probate Court of Allen County, Indiana, 1835

President of the Bank of Indiana, 1857

United States Comptroller of Currency, 1863

Advocated the converting of state banks into national banks

Appointed Secretary of the Treasury, May 18, 1865

tary Chase made it clear that he would expect to have free rein in the organization and management of the Bureau. Mr. McCulloch states: "In no instance while I was Comptroller was an appointment made for the bureau which was not at my request." Here is one department at least where patronage was put on the basis of efficiency and divorced from political favor.

While the aspirations of Mr. Chase to gain the presidential nomination while he was a member of the cabinet was criticized by Mr. McCulloch in later years, it is likely that he was in harmony with the rest of the members of the Treasury Department in promoting the Chase candidacy. The Washington correspondent of the Cincinnati Gazette stated on May 26, 1866 that "Mr. McCulloch was one of the most active members of the famous Chase committee seeking the nomination for Chase." This press correspond-

ent stated McCulloch was also "especially hostile to Lincoln's administration."

The story of his acceptance of the cabinet post vacated by Fessenden, is told by McCulloch in his book on *Men and Measures*. He states that Lincoln said, "I have sent for you, Mr. McCulloch, to let you know that I want you to be Secretary of the Treasury and if you do not object to it, I shall send your name to the Senate." Mr. McCulloch made some comment, about the President trusting his ability to perform such a difficult task, to which the President replied, "I will be responsible for that, and so I reckon we will consider the matter settled." The new secretary finally entered upon his office on March 9, 1865.

If he was not sympathetic with the President's administration in 1864, he soon became an ardent supporter of Mr. Lincoln. As late as April 13, 1865, the day before the assassination, he wrote to Edward J. Sears, editor of the *National Review* at New York; . . . "The more I see of Mr. Lincoln and of Mr. Seward, the more highly do I think of them. If you had the opportunity of meeting them frequently your prejudices against them I am satisfied would disappear."

Sec'y. McCulloch gives an interesting account of one of his last conferences with the President, in which the Chief Executive said: "I am here by the blunders of the Democrats. If, instead of resolving that the war was a failure, they had resolved that I was a failure and denounced me for not more vigorously prosecuting it, I should not have been reelected, and I reckon that you would not have been Secretary of the Treasury."

As far as we have been able to learn the last letter which Lincoln wrote to a member of his cabinet was written to Secretary McCulloch on Executive Mansion stationery dated April 13, 1865, and addressed, "Hon. Sec. of the Treasury." It related to the filling of a vacancy in "the office of Collector of Internal Revenue for the 5th Collection District of California." The next day Lincoln was assassinated.