

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN AND FRATERNAL ORGANIZATIONS

The question is often raised whether or not Lincoln was ever affiliated with any fraternal organizations, secret organizations, and religious denominations. Long before he was nominated for the presidency he was charged with either holding membership in, or on the other hand showing anti-tendencies towards, certain social, philanthropic and reform movements.

While a member of the Illinois Legislature in 1837, he joined with but one other member in objecting to an anti-abolition resolution which had passed, yet he could at no time in his life be definitely associated with the radical anti-slavery forces or in sympathy with the measures which the radical members of the abolitionist group supported.

Abraham Lincoln affiliated with the Washington Temperance Society as early as 1841 and while he is known to have made several speeches in favor of temperance yet he probably could not be classified among the more ardent reformers of that period. The Springfield, *Illinois State Register* charged that he had joined the society for political influence and this charge may have made Lincoln cautious about joining other organizations as time went on.

A group of men who wielded considerable political influence and were opposed to the Catholic Church were tabed "Know-Nothings." Lincoln was accused of having been a member of the organization but this he emphatically denied on several different instances. In a letter to Joshua Speed in 1855 he stated: "I am not a Know-Nothing. That is certain." Writing to Edward Lusk in 1858 he said: "I am not, nor ever have been, connected with the party called the Know-Nothing party."

When Lincoln ran for Congress in 1845 he was charged by his opponents with being an atheist. This accusation he found necessary to deny in the form of a printed poster, yet, modern historians still pin the charge of infidelity upon him. It is admitted generally that he was not a member of any orthodox religious body. The story, so widely circulated in recent years, that he joined a missionary society, can only be sustained by considering donations which he made as fees for membership.

During the war on March 12, 1864, two military officers, members of the Knights of Pythias, were cited to appear before the President and his Secretary of State to answer the charge that the order was a treasonable organization. Secretary Seward asked that the ritual be read, which request was refused unless the President and Secretary would take the obligations. The President is said to have replied, "That is very fair." The Knight then said, "There is one portion of the ritual which I can disclose to you:—Every member of the Order of Knights of Pythias must be loyal to the flag of his nativity or to the flag of his adoption." Thereupon the President is said to have remarked, "Gentlemen you are released. This information has done

the work." It is not likely however that Lincoln could have been received into the order by affirming this one obligation in the ritual.

One of the several political units absorbed by the newly organized Republican Party was known as the "Anti-Masonic group" which openly opposed Freemasonry. During the 1860 campaign Rev. Dyer Burgess of Adams County, Ohio, an anti-mason adherent "wished to support Abraham Lincoln but would not do so until he had written a letter to Mrs. Lincoln and received an answer to the effect that Mr. Lincoln did not belong to any secret society." In a reply written by Mrs. Lincoln to Dyer Burgess on October 29, 1860, there is this statement, "Mr. Lincoln has never been a Mason or belonged to any secret order."

Previous to the writing of this letter by Mrs. Lincoln, but during the same month, Dr. Robert Morris of Oldham County, Kentucky, visited Springfield, Illinois, called on Mr. Lincoln and reported his conversation with the President in these words:

"Mr. Lincoln, I came up the road last night with an old Masonic friend, Judge Douglas. Last Friday I came down to Louisville with another Masonic friend, Mr. Breckenridge, and a few weeks ago one of my agents, Mr. Porter, met in the Grand Lodge of Tennessee, Mr. John Bell. So you see all three of your opponents for the Presidential chair are Freemasons.

"Mr. Lincoln replied: 'I am not a Freemason, Dr. Morris, though I have a great respect for the institution.'"

The *New Age* in its issue for January, 1940, states that Tyrian Lodge of Springfield in its minutes for April 17, 1865, after adopting a resolution on the President's death entered this notation:

"That the decision of President Lincoln to postpone his application for the honors of Masonry, lest his motives be misconstrued, is in the highest degree honorable to his memory."

Possibly a word should be said about Lincoln's association with informal groups which might remove any idea that he was anti-social. While a member of the Illinois Legislature, he was grouped with eight other senators and representatives from Sangamon County known as "The Long Nine." A debating and literary society at Springfield, Ill., held his interest for a period of time. He was classed by his political opponents as a member of the local "Junto" clique of Whigs at Springfield, who were supposed to have controlled the party. His association with a political group in Washington, during his term in Congress known as the Young Indians, further reveals his gregarious tendency. The fact that Lincoln was not a member of several social, philanthropic, and reform groups should not imply he did not have the spirit of fraternalism.