

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 1037

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

February 21, 1949

PROLOGUE TO FAME Steps to the Wigwam No. 8

Lincoln returned home in March 1860 from his triumphant tour of the east to find the Republicans in his own state embroiled in bitter controversies and political rivalries. Two of the leading Republicans of the state, John Wentworth, and Norman Judd, both of Chicago, had been calling each other names which had resulted in a libel suit. Wentworth wanted to be mayor of Chicago and Judd wanted to be governor of Illinois, and both were doing all in their power to prevent each other from attaining their respective objectives.

Two more of Lincoln's friends, Leonard Swett and Richard Yates, were also aspiring to the governorship and of course along with Judd were seeking Lincoln's endorsement. Another ally Lincoln had counted on, Ebenezer Peck, was reported to be supporting the Democratic candidate for mayor of Chicago against Wentworth, and the powerful Chicago Tribune was apparently withholding its support of the Republican nominee for mayor. This condition of things caused David Davis to write Lincoln three days after he had departed for New York:

"If Judd, Peck, and the rest of them succeed in beating Wentworth the prospects of carrying Illinois would not be worth a gnat. . . . Your political prospects it seems to me depend on your course in Chicago." It might also be added that Lincoln was advised that Judd really favored Lyman Trumbull as the presidential candidate from Illinois; that southern Illinois seemed to be for Bates; and northern Illinois for Seward.

Out of these discordant elements Lincoln was supposed to mold a formidable political unit within a period of ten weeks, which would be sufficiently united and strong enough to place his name in nomination at Chicago, for the Presidency of the United States. It seemed like a herculean task inasmuch as he had no semblance of any organized movement under way, unless one might imply the Illinois State Central Committee was for him. Even his very closest political advisor, Judge Davis, believed at the time Lincoln returned from New York that either Bates or Seward would be the nominee.

Lincoln was not only without a local organization at this time, but his friends in other states had not been encouraged to form Lincoln clubs. From Lafayette, Indiana, H. Johnson wrote to Lincoln on February 24: "So delicate have been the demonstrations of your friends, I should be at loss to know to whom to address myself." Letters from Ohio also imply that Lincoln's individual supporters there had no idea whom Lincoln's political sponsors were in Illinois.

Lincoln's reluctance to come out publicly and press his bid against other candidates, who for years had been groomed for the place, may have been encouraged by John Wentworth who wrote to Lincoln on February 6:

"As to yourself I give you the advice I gave Douglas prior to the convention that nominated Pierce at Cincinnati. Look out for *prominence*. When it is ascertained that no one of the prominent candidates can be nominated then ought to be your time. This plan would have nominated Douglas. It should nominate you to one of the offices."

The Lincoln Papers which throw new light on pre-convention alignments also reveal other little known episodes in the political situation in late April, 1860. Wentworth had already been elected as the Republican mayor of Chicago, much to Lincoln's advantage. Davis paid him a visit and immediately wrote to Lincoln a remarkable letter which reveals that Long John had made a great impression on Davis, who opened his letter to Lincoln with this statement, "I am more and more

convinced of the wonderful power of John Wentworth." Davis then continued:

"But *sub rosa*, Wentworth is for you decidedly and emphatically. He is for Seward in his paper for purposes that are satisfactory to me. The Germans in Chicago love Seward. Judd is against Seward. Wentworth wants to beat Judd. He must do it through the Dutch. Hence for Seward. . . . There are 5000 Dutch and Scandinavian voters in Chicago. They cannot and must not be lost."

On April 24, the day after Davis wrote to Lincoln, Lyman Trumbull, the Illinois senator who was holding office largely through the magnanimity of Lincoln, wrote a long letter to Lincoln on "my impressions in regard to the Presidency." His first observation was not very encouraging when he stated, "In regard to yourself I am inclined to believe that between you and Governor Seward, if the contest should assume that shape, that he would most likely succeed." Trumbull's second supposition was that Seward if nominated could not be elected, so with Lincoln and Seward both eliminated, Trumbull puts forth an argument in favor of Judge McLean and asks Lincoln, "would our state go for him in the convention after you." Trumbull then hastens to assure Lincoln, "I wish to be distinctly understood as first and foremost for you." Trumbull's final appeal in favor of McLean states, "My reason for suggesting a rally upon him against Seward is the belief that it would be better to take him and possible victory than Seward and possible defeat." Trumbull further advises Lincoln that "the success of such a cause as we are engaged in should not be first imperiled by personal consideration," as if Lincoln's own personal sacrifice had not put Trumbull in the Senate.

Now apparently Trumbull wants Lincoln to again climb upon an altar when this time he may be sacrificed for McLean. A further stab at the sacrificial Lincoln comes in the very last sentence in the letter when Trumbull states, "I do not believe Douglas will be elected," hence the implication, no need to bring on the conqueror of Douglas as a candidate. There is some indication that Trumbull entertained the idea that his own candidacy might be enhanced with another Lincoln sacrifice.

A factor of major consideration to Lincoln was the moving forward of the national convention from June 13 to May 16. At first this move must have discouraged Lincoln as it cut down the time left necessary for organization nearly a third, yet if he did not wish to gain "prominence" it was a good thing. Of more importance however, was the fact that it placed the National Republican Convention at Chicago just one week after the Illinois State Convention at Decatur.

The details of the Decatur convention are so well known to every student of Lincoln, especially the introduction by Richard Oglesby of John Hanks with the Lincoln Rails, that further discussion of it does not seem necessary. One might conclude that it was not until the phenomenal demonstration at Decatur took place that there was any evidence among the Illinois Republicans that they were keyed for a one week's concerted drive almost unparalleled in American politics. It was based however on the remarkable ground work which Lincoln had prepared for just such a scene. Wentworth had been not only elected mayor of Chicago but also stopped Judd. Judd while defeated for the nomination for governor at Decatur, had won out over Wentworth for a place among the four delegates at large for the Chicago Convention. So finally the full Republican strength was back of Lincoln.

While the favorite son nomination of Lincoln was anticipated at Decatur, no one expected that such a tremendous surge of enthusiasm would be generated, that unabated it would flow over into the Chicago convention and engulf the delegates of the larger and more important assembly. Decatur furnished for Abraham Lincoln The Prologue to Fame.