

# 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 1114

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

August 14, 1950

## THE BALTIMORE UNION CONVENTION, 1864

The only national convention ever held by the Union party assembled at Baltimore, Maryland on June 7, 1864. The breaking up of the old Democratic party and the beginning of civil strife drew together groups of men irrespective of former political alignments who were loyal to the Union. It is doubtful if any political convention ever assembled represented so many different political faiths, many of which had contributed to the forming of the new but now extinct Republican party. As early as June 18, 1862 a Union convention was held in Indiana at the state capital and soon most of the states had brought together the loyal elements into a national political unit to be known as the Union party.

Although a concerted drive by the abolitionists and anti-administration forces had been made to prevent or postpone this convention, their efforts were to no avail. It does not appear as if there was ever any doubt in the minds of the friends of the administration about Lincoln's securing the nomination at Baltimore. The attitude of David Davis of Illinois, the most aggressive sponsor to Mr. Lincoln's nomination at Chicago in 1860 clearly reveals this attitude. In a letter to the President written on June 2 he states:

"Personally I would like to go to Baltimore . . . I clearly see there is no need for me in your behalf." He does drop a word of advice to Mr. Lincoln about conferring with Leonard Swett. He writes: "I trust that you will talk freely with Mr. Swett. In such a body if any question comes up that requires prudent management, he cannot fail to appreciate them and act accordingly."

However, the Illinois delegation and especially Cook, its chairman, became somewhat worried about Swett's activities and persuaded John Nicolay to learn from the President's attitude towards Swett and through John Hay's information this memorandum was forwarded: "Swett is unquestionably all right."

David V. Dickinson of Pennsylvania, a leader in the old Democratic party wrote to Mr. Lincoln on the same day Davis wrote that he had been unanimously elected a delegate to the convention "for which compliment I am indebted to the fact that I was known to be your warm friend, more than to my own popularity."

On the very same day, June 2, the War Democratic General Committee of the city and county of New York held a meeting at Cooper Institute and it was unanimously resolved that: "They believe that the exigencies of the times, the faithful and patriotic manner in which he has exercised the duties of the executive chair call for the renomination of President Lincoln."

Telegrams began to come to the White House as soon as the delegates assembled. One from Frederick C. Meyer brought the compliments of the chairman of the National Committee and reported the "convention now being organized and overflowing with his (Lincoln's) friends, the friends of the Union." The concluding information in the telegram stated: "The convention has just been called to order, everything progressing."

Ward H. Lamon at Baltimore also sent a telegram to Lincoln on June 7 in which he stated, "Enthusiastic unanimity beyond even my expectations."

John Nicolay, the President's secretary, attended the convention and if he was not there as Mr. Lincoln's representative, it is difficult to find any one who had that distinction. He wrote to John Hay who remained at Washington, "The delegations being so unanimous for Lincoln are in a great measure indifferent in other matters . . . The convention is almost too passive to be interesting—certainly it is not at all exciting, as it was in Chicago."

Robert J. Breckinridge, the temporary chairman, made this significant statement in the opening address of the convention: "As a Union party I will follow you to the ends of the earth, and to the gates of death. But as an Abolition party, as a Republican party, as a Whig party, as a Democrat party, as an American party, I will not follow you one foot."

As the convention proceeded with respect to Lincoln's nomination Nicolay wrote, "I suppose a similar unanimity has not occurred during the whole history of the country."

On the very first ballot Lincoln received every vote except those of the delegation of Missouri Radicals who supported Grant. The nomination for the Vice President went to Johnson but space will not permit a detailed discussion about the forces which brought about his nomination. Suffice to say that he represented the Democratic wing of the Union party while Lincoln had formerly been affiliated with the Republican wing, a logical and practical arrangement.

The general satisfaction with which the nomination of Lincoln and Johnson was received is indicated by a resolution which was prepared by the Union League of New York to secure the reaction of its members throughout the state. By July 8 returns were received from 5,331 people, all but six of them in favor of the ticket.

Members of the National Union League paid the President a visit the day after his nomination and his reply to them is significant. It follows in part:

"I can only say in response to the kind remarks of your chairman, as I suppose, that I am very grateful for the renewed confidence which has been accorded to me both by the convention and by the National League. I am not insensible at all to the personal compliment there is in this, and yet I do not allow myself to believe that any but a small portion of it is to be appropriated as a personal compliment. That really the convention and the Union League assembled with a higher view—that of taking care of the interests of the country for the present and the great future—and that the part I am entitled to appropriate as a compliment is only that part which I may hold of, as being the opinion of the convention and of the League, that I am not entirely unworthy to be intrusted with the place which I have occupied for the last three years."