

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 1118

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

September 11, 1950

THE CINCINNATI CALL

(Political Puzzle of 1864 No. 8)*

Every possible means was employed by anti-administration forces to prevent Abraham Lincoln from securing the presidential nomination in the convention of the Union party scheduled for June 6, 1864 at Baltimore, Md. The almost unanimous voice with which the assembly selected Lincoln as their candidate should have warned the various groups attempting to unseat him of the tremendous hold which he had on the people.

During the weeks following the conclave reverses suffered by the Union army greatly disturbed the citizens of the north. Therefore the stage was set for another organized attempt to undo the work of the Baltimore Convention. The opposition first found expression in New York and what appeared to be the most formidable attempt to supplant Lincoln with another candidate reached its climax in August.

The importance and far reaching influence of this movement was called to attention in the issue of the *New York Sun* for June 3, 1889. Forty letters directed to John A. Stevens in 1864 were published which revealed that some of the nation's best known politicians were mixed up with the enterprise. These Stevens papers are now in the archives of the New York Historical Society. More important revelations are in the Lincoln papers in the Library of Congress which reveal that the President was well informed about the affair and the identity of those back of it.

John A. Stevens, an officer of the New York Chamber of Commerce, served as promoter of the anti-Lincoln organization, although George Opdyke and David Dudley Field seemed to be the prime movers in the plan. Those present at the initial meeting of the group on August 19th were:

George Opdyke, David Dudley Field, John A. Milliard, Thomas B. Carroll, Henry Winter Davis, William Curtis Noyes, Col. Gregg of Elmira, Capt. Herbert, Roscoe Conklin, Col. Shaffer of Gen. Butler's staff, Ex-Governor Robert Campbell, Ex-Congressman Wall and John Austin Stevens.

Ex-Governor Campbell was made chairman of the meeting and John A. Stevens, secretary. Hon. S. P. Chase, Horace Greeley, and Gov. Andrew of Massachusetts expressed themselves as in sympathy with the new political thrust at Lincoln. Horace Greeley wrote to Mayor Opdyke the day before the meeting, "Mr. Lincoln is already beaten. He cannot be elected. And we must have another ticket to save us from the overthrow."

A subcommittee was appointed which brought out on August 22 a printed call for a convention. Cincinnati was finally decided upon as the logical place for the gathering so it became known as *The Cincinnati Call*. The salutation was directed "To the Public" and two different resolutions were prepared. For New Yorkers who were outspoken in their opposition to Lincoln this paragraph appeared: "That none of the candidates for the Presidency already presented can commend the United confidence and support of all loyal and patriotic men." However, Illinois was not quite ready to openly

repudiate her own Lincoln and the following printed paragraph replaced the one used in New York: "That the present distraction and apathy, which depress the friends of the Union, threaten to throw the government into the hands of the enemy."

The day after this first meeting of the committee in New York, Lincoln received a letter from W. C. Phillips which stated, "A movement is being inaugurated to bring a union or war candidate in opposition to you. . . . One J. H. Herbert, has been sent west to Campbell, Chase, Charley Anderson and other parties." A week later Lincoln was handed a letter that Major Richard Corwine of Cincinnati had written to W. P. Dole which revealed the activities of Captain J. H. Herbert on behalf of the candidacy of Gen. Benjamin F. Butler who was regarded as the prospective candidate in opposition to Mr. Lincoln. Dole endorsed this letter with this statement with reference to Herbert's activities, "I am not prepared to believe that General B. (Butler) has his staff so engaged."

Winter Davis became restless with the apparent inability of Stevens and his steering committee to get organizations perfected and signatures for the call did not flood the offices of the Opdyke-Cincinnati movement. Although a date had been set for the convention, September 28, an unforeseen factor soon changed the whole political situation.

While politically minded army officers were being put forth as possible candidates to oppose Lincoln, military minded generals and admirals began to achieve some important victories for the Union. By the first week in September the accomplishments on both land and sea had been so impressive that on September 3 the President issued a Proclamation of Thanksgiving. The sentiments set forth in the document could well have been issued as an expression of his own personal gratification as opposition to the administration diminished with each subsequent victory. These military successes which practically invalidated the Cincinnati call and made futile any attempt to sidetrack Abraham Lincoln are set forth in the preamble of the Proclamation of Thanksgiving.

"The signal success that divine Providence has recently vouchsafed to the operations of the United States fleet and army in the harbor of Mobile, and the reduction of Fort Powell, Fort Gaines, and Fort Morgan, and the glorious achievements of the army under Major General Sherman, in the State of Georgia, resulting in the capture of the city of Atlanta, call for devout acknowledgment to the Supreme Being in whose hands are the destinies of nations."

The concluding sentence of the proclamation invokes God "to continue to uphold the Government of the United States against all efforts of public enemies and secret foes." The political fortunes of General Benjamin Butler as far as the year 1864 was concerned died along with call for a Union Convention at Cincinnati although some half hearted effort was made to sustain interest in putting a rival union candidate in the field.

*Lincoln Lore Number 1114 entitled "The Baltimore Union Convention, 1864," should have carried the subtitle, Political Puzzle of 1864 No. 7."