

LINCOLN LORE

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G. LINCOLN LAUDS A. LINCOLN

There has been much discussion over who should be recognized as having first seriously proposed Abraham Lincoln for the Presidency. Several of the railsplitter's friends in the midwest, have vied with one another for this honor. However, George B. Lincoln with business address at 328 Broadway, New York City possibly should be named the earliest consistent booster for the Illinois lawyer as the Republican nominee in 1860.

We are fortunate in having a copy of a letter written by George Lincoln to Cephas Brainerd, Esq. in which the writer tells specifically why he became interested in the political fortunes of the westerner. He wrote:

"For three years and more I had been busy, as opportunity offered, in trying to make, in my small way, a public sentiment in favor of my western namesake as the Rep. candidate for President for 1860. Had my name been Brainerd, I would never have thought of it, but the identity of name and the wonderfully good name he bore at home, the story of which I had been made familiar with, supplemented by the action of the Convention that nominated Fremont in Phila. in 1856 giving Mr. L. 110 votes for Vice Pres. induced me to say to my political friends, that no name could be presented as our next candidate for President, in my opinion—so sure to be elected as that of this plain man of the Prairies!"

The business interests of George Lincoln often took him to central Illinois and especially the state capital where he heard much about the popularity of the local lawyer bearing the same surname as his own. This is the way he recorded his initial effort in seeking Abraham Lincoln's nomination for the Presidency in 1860:

"The first winter after the defeat of Fremont I visited Springfield while the Legislature was in session and there sought out the leaders of the Rep. Party in that body. Leonard Swett was then a member of the senate and looked up to as its leader.

"I called upon Mr. Swett and stated my errand—viz. to assure him—as an eastern man: that my belief was, that his neighbor and friend Abraham Lincoln, if he could be nominated, could more surely be elected than any man in the Rep. Party.

"Mr. Swett seemed much interested in what I said, and immediately called together a number of his political friends, and asked me to state to them, as I had to him, my belief, and my reasons therefor. All seemed much interested to hear a New York man talk thus."

Shortly after his conference George Lincoln had the opportunity to make the acquaintance of his presidential prospect and reports his first conversation with him in these words:

"When I told him my reasons for seeking his acquaintance he laughed heartily, and said, 'Oh! they all want Seward.' I told him, as I had told Swett & co. before, that it all depended upon the action of his western friends;—that no headway could be made against the Seward influence in the East. I felt sure that the West could nominate him if faithful to him and that nothing could stand in the way of his election if so nominated. This was in the winter of 56 and 7."

The optimistic New York business man continued to keep boosting "Lincoln for President" and by the time of the Chicago convention was called he "had become well acquainted with Mr. Lincoln, probably better than any one in New York." With the opening of the presidential year 1860, as early as January 12, George B.

Lincoln contributed an article to the *Chicago Press and Tribune* and signed it with his initials in reverse "L. B. G." Commenting on the viewpoint of some of his New York friends, he stated with reference to Seward:

"Not that they disregard the claims of Mr. Seward, but think they can suggest a name, stronger in the west, where, after all, the tug of war must come . . . but among them all I hear none which seems to bring such a hearty and enthusiastic response as that of your own good citizen Abraham Lincoln."

In this same *Tribune* article "L. B. G." relates an incident which had recently occurred at the Illinois state capital:

"In conversation with a strong Douglas man in Springfield last week I asked him what would be the result if 'Old Abe' was the candidate for the Republicans. He replied, 'It would be devilish bad for us.'"

All these pronouncements emanating from the future candidate's self appointed publicity agent appeared even before Abraham Lincoln's famous Cooper Institute speech, when the orator is supposed to have first attracted an eastern constituency. When George learned that Abraham was coming to New York for an address he planned to make himself as useful to the visitor as possible. They both arrived at the Astor House on Saturday morning, February 25, 1860 about the same time and George served as sort of a reception committee for Abraham during the day. Several visitors thought they might even be brothers. George lived in Brooklyn and was a member of Plymouth Church and learning that Abraham would be interested in hearing Dr. Beecher arranged to escort him to the church on Sunday morning where the pew of Mr. H. C. Bowers was occupied.

The climax of the social intercourse between George and Abraham must have come on Monday preliminary to the great speech. Col. William M. Bramall gives us this reminiscence: "I sat at dinner with Abraham Lincoln at the house of Hon. George B. Lincoln in Brooklyn February 27, 1860 and that night listened to his speech at Cooper Institute." One can imagine how gratifying it must have been for George Lincoln to have entertained in his home as a dinner guest the man who for four years he had been boosting for the Republican presidential nomination.

This one man New York press agency did not retire in favor of the many who were by this time urging the nomination of Lincoln for President but on the very day the Republican Party convened at the national convention in the Wigwam the *Chicago Press and Tribune* published one of George Lincoln's letters, at the very head of several communications. This letter by a New Yorker with its logical argument in favor of Lincoln over New York's Seward must have supplemented considerably the growing Lincoln sentiment.

It is needless to say that one of the earliest congratulatory letters that the Republican nominee received after his victory at Chicago was from George Lincoln. Just a line of the four page correspondence is presented. "Well, the work is done, and well done up to this point. God be thanked for that." The New Yorker did not relax in his efforts until he saw the Republican nominee elected to the presidency. Although little credit has been given to this one man publicity enterprise it is doubtful if any other private citizen more consistently over so long a period of time, worked more ardently for the nomination and election of Abraham Lincoln than George B. Lincoln.