

LINCOLN LORE

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MISSOURI FACTIONS TORMENT LINCOLN

None of the border states caused President Lincoln so much worry and anxiety as Missouri. The Union sympathizers though greatly in the majority divided themselves into different hostile political camps so that the minority opposition or non-union element at times seemed to have the greater strength. The trouble started as early as the Fremont proclamation of August 30, 1861 and continued almost unabated through the entire war. Each group seemingly placed their grievances before the President. Mr. Lincoln wrote to Hon. B. Gratz Brown on Jan. 7, 1863: "The administration takes no part between its friends in Missouri of whom I, at least, consider you one."

On May 15, 1863 the President wrote to Hon. H. T. Blow and others:

"It is very painful to me that you in Missouri cannot or will not settle your factional quarrels among yourselves. I have been tormented with it beyond endurance for months."

On the 5th of October the same year the President directed a letter to a Missouri committee consisting of Hon. Charles D. Drake and others which is a classic in setting forth the divisive sentiments which are usually evident in a civil war. The President wrote: "It is easy to conceive that all these shades of opinion, and even more, may be sincerely entertained by honest and truthful men. . . . At once sincerity is questioned, and motives are assailed. Actual war coming, blood grows hot, and blood is spilled. Thought is forced from old channels into confusion. Deception breeds and thrives. Confidence dies and universal suspicion reigns. Each man feels an impulse to kill his neighbor, lest he be first killed by him. Revenge and retaliation follow. And all this as before said may be amongst honest men only; but this is not all. Every foul bird comes abroad and every dirty reptile rises up. These add crime to confusion. . . . Old grudges and murders for pelf, proceed under any cloak that will best cover for the occasion."

Preliminary to the fall election in 1864 it appeared to Lincoln as if the opposition element in Missouri might be able to elect a congressman that would further embarrass the administration. Desiring to know just the status of the turmoil in Missouri the President sent his secretary, John G. Nicolay, to Missouri to contact the leaders of the factions and report the actual conditions there. Nicolay wrote from Springfield, Illinois on October 18, 1864. Excerpts from Nicolay's long eleven page letter which follow seem to set forth more clearly, the exact political situation in Missouri than it is presented anywhere else:

"I arrived here last night having left St. Louis yesterday morning. I was there over a week and talked very fully with our friends of all the different factions and have I think as full and fair an understanding of their quarrels as one can get in such a brief time."

"My conclusion is, that there is little else than *personal animosity*, and the usual eagerness to appropriate the spoils, that is left to prevent a full and harmonious combination of all the Union voters of Missouri. Even these obstacles are fast giving way before the change and pressure of circumstances and the mere lapse of time."

"Of the Claybank faction, but little is left in point of numbers. Such portion of them as did not go to the Democracy (where they originally came from) are fusing with the Radicals, until but a small nucleus, consisting

of the office holders and a few old personal friends of Frank Blair remain as a distinct and separate organization. They are held aloof more by pride and personal feeling I think than anything else. . . .

"A number of the Claybanks, however, took part in the primary meeting and convention for the nomination of the county ticket and two or three Claybanks were put on the ticket."

"Fay and Blair both told me that the only test they desired to make was that candidates whether State, Congressional or County should avow themselves for you. . . .

"As to the Radicals, Hume called on me the day after my arrival and told me that he had some weeks before interrogated Fletcher, the Radical candidate for Governor and had received his private assurance that he would support you, but that he did not then deem it politic to declare his purpose, because such avowal would almost certainly alienate from him a large number of Germans who were yet bitterly hostile to you and who in such event would take measure to set up a ticket of their own. . . .

"The congressional convention for the second district was held and nominated Blow. He had not yet, even in private, admitted that he would vote for you. On the 12th the congressional convention for the 1st district met. Knox was the candidate for the 'Democrat' office clique. C. P. Johnson was the candidate of those against the 'Democrat.' Johnson was nominated but the Knox men contended that the nomination was unfair and have bolted and when I left were obtaining signatures requesting Knox to run independently. As that however would most likely insure the election of a Democrat efforts were also being made to induce both Johnson and Knox to resign and combine the Union vote on Judge Clover. . . .

"I urged upon the factions in the 1st Cong. district that their quarrel there ought not to be permitted to loose us the congressman that if we continued to make gains as we have done in Indiana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania we should get a two-thirds vote in the house and be able to pass the constitutional amendment about Slavery. They acknowledged the importance of the matter and will I think unite on a third candidate and elect him."

"Your obt. servant
Jno. G. Nicolay."

When the Union Convention at Baltimore assembled in June two delegations from Missouri desired to be seated. The Radical union delegates known to be opposed to Lincoln were given the preference and it was the only delegation that did not vote for Lincoln on the first ballot.

As late as February 20, 1865, the President still greatly disturbed by conditions in Missouri, wrote to Governor Fletcher in part as follows:

"It seems . . . that destruction of property and life is rampant everywhere. Is not the cure for this in easy reach of the people themselves? It cannot but be that every man not naturally a robber or a cut-throat would gladly put an end to this state of things. . . . Let neighborhood meetings be everywhere called and held . . . Let all such meet, and waiving all else, pledge each to cease harassing others, and to make common cause against whoever persists in making, aiding, or encouraging further disturbance . . . at such meetings old friendships will cross the memory and honor and Christian charity will come in to help."