

# LINCOLN LORE

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## LINCOLN, TAFT AND THE REPUBLICANS

The title "Mr. Republican" bestowed upon the late Senator Robert A. Taft might well have been conferred upon Abraham Lincoln during his later years. In fact, Taft and Lincoln had much in common in their basic political philosophy. The crowning virtue of each man was downright integrity which called for honest thinking and action. Their concepts about the great fundamental principles of America were in harmony. Speaking about the purpose of the war to a regiment of soldiers from Taft's home state, Ohio, Lincoln remarked: "It is in order that each of you may have through this free government which we have enjoyed, an open field and a fair chance for your industry, enterprise and intelligence; that you may all have equal privileges in the race of life, with all its desirable human aspirations."

Taft put the same idea in these words: "Liberty of the individual to think his own thoughts and live his own life as he desires to think and live . . . liberty of a man to choose his own occupation, liberty of a man to run his own business as he thinks it ought to be run, as long as he does not interfere with other people to do the same thing."

The columnists recognizing Mr. Taft as the preeminent Republican over a period of years, have been doing some speculating as to how the senator's death would effect the party. One commentator went so far as to say that the party would die without Taft's leadership but another ventured the suggestion that the Republican Party was already dead. These comments invite a review of the political upheaval at the time of the death of Lincoln, the first Mr. Republican.

Hon. S. C. Pomeroy made a speech in the Senate of the United States on March 10, 1864 in which he made this statement, "No party now exists which has ever been seen in a national convention." He disposed of one group with these words: "The Democratic Party . . . held its discontented elements together until the Charleston convention in 1860 . . . the two factions struck against each other and were destroyed in the concussion. Since then we have known no national Democratic Party." With respect to the other political unit he stated, "The mission of the Republican Party was ended when its work was accomplished. That work was to stay the progress of slavery and preserve the public domain to freedom. It never pretended to aim at more. But it made two splendid campaigns and died in its last triumph!"

Pomeroy had been interrupted in the course of his remarks by Senator Doolittle of Wisconsin who inquired, "Am I to understand him (Pomeroy) as organizing a new political party?" Pomeroy's remarks were somewhat over-shadowed by a pamphlet which he issued attacking the administration and setting forth Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury, as a possible head of a new political unit.

It will appear from the viewpoint of Senator Pomeroy that the Republican Party died while Lincoln still lived. The fact that Lincoln did not run as a Republican candidate in the campaign of 1864 confirms more or less the senator's opinion. Out of the collapse of the two major parties the new Union Party was created and it was composed of a majority of former Republicans and members of the old national Democratic Party who were supporting the war effort. There is no mention of a na-

tional Republican Party in the campaign of 1864. Much of the criticism of Lincoln's attitude towards patronage grew out of his attempt to recognize former Democrats who were then supporting the administration.

As early as April 4, 1864 a circular was issued by retiring Democrats calling for a union of all people whose primary interest was in the saving of the Union. The names of leading former Democrats such as Dick, Sickles, Dickinson, Brady, Cisco, Pierpont and Cochran signed to the document. It was a former Democratic constitutional representation by this group which contributed to the forming of a Union Party. It was almost inevitable that the name of the new political party, then taking form, would be named the Union Party, which brought together all those irrespective of former political affiliations who believed that "The Union must be preserved."

When the convention that nominated Lincoln in 1864 assembled at Baltimore it was not called a Republican gathering but a Union convention. The delegates came from both the former Republican constituency and the loyal section of the now extinct old line Democratic Party. It was a display of good politics by the promoters of the new party to have both of the predominant political elements represented at the head of the ticket. Abraham Lincoln was given the nomination for the Presidency and Andrew Johnson, a former Democratic governor of Tennessee, was made his running mate. This ticket carried the election and the new Union Party should be given the credit of winning the war. Lincoln apparently recognized the heterogeneous character of the new party as he soon began appointing men who were formerly leaders in the old Democratic ranks to places of trust and importance in the administration.

Almost on the heels of the inaugural came the assassination of the former Republican leader and the President of the newly organized Union Party. The elevation of the Vice President to the President's chair, of a former political leader of the defunct Democrats, did not set well with the former Republican block which formed the majority group in the party in power. It was not long before the impeachment proceedings against Johnson and other incidents of purely a political nature caused the old Republican and Democratic party lines to again be drawn and the resurrection of the Republican Party of 1860 became an assured fact. Inasmuch as Johnson's advancement to the President's chair was made possible by Lincoln's assassination, it will be observed that Lincoln's death was a fundamental factor in the rebirth of the Republican Party.

While Lincoln may not have been one of the actual founders of the Republican Party, he did give the main address at Springfield, Illinois during the week in October 1854 at the time the first convention was meeting in the city and was also named on the State Central Committee. In 1856 he was among the candidates whose names were put before the first Republican convention at Baltimore for the Vice Presidency and was considered the outstanding member of the party in the west. Four years later he led them to victory as the presidential nominee.

We do not know how the demise of Senator Taft may effect the Republican Party of today but apparently the death of President Lincoln in 1865 brought the then defunct Republican Party back to life again.