

# LINCOLN LORE

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## LINCOLN WAITS HIS TURN FOR CONGRESS

The Illinois Seventh Congressional District Convention of the Whig party met at Pekin on May 1, 1843 for the purpose of electing its nominees for Congress. A peculiar aftermath of the convention in which Abraham Lincoln played an important part is responsible for the terminology used in the title of this bulletin. Preliminary to the convention the counties in the district held their assemblies and elected their various choices for Congress. John J. Hardin was nominated by Morgan County, Edward Baker by Sangamon, and Abraham Lincoln by Menard and some of the other smaller counties.

The Sangamon County Whig Convention was held in Springfield on March 20 with Lincoln and Baker striving for the nomination. After several ballots Lincoln withdrew in favor of Baker. Although Lincoln seriously objected, he was made a member of the Sangamon delegation to sponsor the candidacy of Baker.

Martin S. Morris, a delegate from Menard, advised Lincoln that his old county in which New Salem was located had instructed the delegates to vote for Lincoln first and second for Hardin. Lincoln wrote, "You say you will instruct your delegates to go for me unless I object. I certainly shall not object. That would be too pleasant a compliment for me to tread in the dust, and besides, if anything should happen (which, however, is not probable) by which Baker should be thrown out of the fight, I would be at liberty to accept the nomination if I could get it."

Lincoln continued: "I do, however, feel myself bound not to hinder him in any way from getting the nomination. I should despise myself if I were to attempt it." A rumor about one of the other candidate's procedure to secure delegates Lincoln would not believe and he concluded that rather than pursue such a course "I would as soon put my head in the fire as to attempt it. I should feel myself strongly dishonored by it."

Lincoln found himself in a strange predicament when the Pekin district convention assembled. He was not only a delegate from Sangamon pledged to sponsor the interests of Baker's candidacy, but he was also favored by some of the other counties who had instructed their delegates to vote for him as the nominee of the party. So it appears as if he was obliged to play a double role. However, he is said to have advised some of his supporters before the convention opened that after his name was put in nomination he would ask that it be withdrawn. He continued, "My Honor is out with Baker, I'll suffer my right arm to be cut off before I violate it."

Inasmuch as Menard had selected Hardin as its second choice, Lincoln's withdrawal threw more strength to Hardin which inadvertently worked against Baker whom Lincoln was supporting. It was soon evident that Hardin was the strongest of the candidates and apparently with the authority of Baker, Lincoln as chairman of the Sangamon delegates withdrew Baker's name so Hardin received the unanimous vote of the delegates and a contest in the convention was averted.

The withdrawal of both Lincoln and Baker from the contest in deference to Hardin, left him under obligation to them. It is apparent there was some sort of an

agreement among the three candidates that they would not oppose one another in the future until each had a term in Congress. Apparently they were left free to support other candidates however, who also had the privilege of seeking the nomination. This sentiment finds expression in the following strange document, probably drawn up by Lincoln and submitted to the convention:

"RESOLVED, That this convention, as individuals, recommend E. D. Baker as a suitable person to be voted for by the Whigs of this district, for Representative to Congress, at the election in 1844, subject to the decision of a District Convention, should the Whigs of the district think proper to hold one."

This resolution clearly implies that Baker had withdrawn at Pekin with the understanding that his name would be submitted at the next convention, implying that there was some promise made that Hardin would not succeed himself. Apparently there was also some kind of agreement that Baker would ask for but one term so that the way would be open for Lincoln four years hence.

When the next Seventh District Convention was held at Fremont on May 6, 1844, Baker's name was put before the convention which complied with the resolution submitted at the previous convention. Baker had no opposition and was named as the Whig nominee for Congress without opposition, so Lincoln had another period of waiting, before his turn to try out for the nomination would arrive. He was not idle however, but extending his political fences in preparation for the 1846 convention.

An important domestic episode occurred in the Lincoln home during this period of waiting which indicates that there was the kindest of feelings existing between Lincoln and Baker. Both had been rivals for the congressional nomination in 1843 and now Baker was serving his term in Washington. On March 10, 1846 a second child was born to Mary and Abraham Lincoln which they named Edward Baker Lincoln, in honor of the Whig congressman from the Seventh Illinois District.

Lincoln was honored by his constituents during this period by having been chosen a presidential elector from Illinois for Henry Clay. Always his idol from a youth, Lincoln entered enthusiastically into the campaign for the man who was largely responsible for Lincoln's political philosophy. He not only canvassed for Clay a good part of the state but also gave a series of speeches in the Indiana community where he had lived before coming to Illinois. While the Whigs carried Sangamon County, they lost the state by 13,000 votes.

While Lincoln was despondent over the defeat of Clay, he had won for himself during this campaign the deep appreciation of the Whigs throughout the state and especially those of the Seventh Congressional District. Judge Davis said of him during this canvass, "Lincoln is the best stump speaker in the state." He could not have spent his time while waiting for his term in Congress to greater personal political advantage than his forensic efforts put forth as an elector for the idol of the Whig Party.