

LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Number 1419

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

June 18, 1956

LINCOLN TWICE ESCAPES THE VICE PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION

Long an insignificant office, the vice presidency of the United States seems at present to carry more prestige than formerly and is rapidly becoming the nation's public relations portfolio. Eventually the position may serve as an actual stepping stone to the chief executive's chair, rather than a stumbling block to political advancement, except of course where the demise of the President occurs. Certainly one hundred years ago the office did not hold out much prospect for the ambitious presidential aspirant. The incumbent was usually selected because of his sectional political strength and his ability to garner votes.

Abraham Lincoln's popularity within the newly organized Republican party in the northwest especially after his remarkable lost speech at Bloomington, might have thrust the vice presidential nomination upon him at the Philadelphia convention in 1856 which was called together one hundred years ago this week. Again in 1860 a concerted effort was made to make him the vice presidential nominee on one of the party tickets but Lincoln's own strategy allowed him to evade this political pitfall. To one who was admittedly politically ambitious, it is strange that twice he escaped the vice presidential nomination of the new Republican party.

Lincoln was probably one of the most surprised men in America when he polled 110 votes on the first ballot, as a vice presidential nominee at the Philadelphia Republican Convention in 1856. There is no evidence that Lincoln was informed that his name was to be put forward for this office before the assembly convened and apparently there was no concerted drive to elect him to the office after the convention opened. If the political gathering had been some three or four weeks later so that the enthusiastic constituents who heard Lincoln's Lost Speech at Bloomington could have done some preliminary canvassing, it is very likely Lincoln could not have escaped the nomination for the second place on the ticket.

There were fifteen nominees for the vice presidency at Philadelphia but William L. Dayton of New Jersey and Abraham Lincoln of Illinois were the only two candidates to draw strength from several states, Dayton receiving votes from fourteen states and Lincoln from eleven. On the first ballot Dayton received 253 votes and Lincoln 110 of the 561 votes cast, leaving 198 votes distributed among the other thirteen candidates. On the second ballot, by the time Delaware was reached on the roll call, although Dayton and Lincoln were virtually the only candidates left, Illinois withdrew Lincoln's name in favor of Dayton, Judge Palmer stating: "Illinois asks nothing for herself in this contest . . . Therefore we say to those of our friends who have favored us, we commend them to withdraw the votes thus cast for Mr. Lincoln and give them that direction that will make the vote unanimous and harmonious for William L. Dayton."

It is interesting to observe that Dayton who was selected, was given little or no consideration as a candidate for the presidency four years later outside of the state of New Jersey which gave him her vote. It would appear as if Lincoln might have suffered the same fate if he had been nominated as a vice president on the 1856 ticket.

W. E. Frazer of Cookstown, Pennsylvania, one of Simon Cameron's supporters for the presidency, wrote to Lincoln on October 24, 1859 naming Cameron and Lincoln as the Republican ticket for 1860. The reply to the letter dated November 11, 1859 stated: "I shall be heartily for it, after it shall have been fairly nomi-

nated by a Republican national convention." This statement makes it quite clear that Lincoln was not adverse at this time to receiving the vice presidential nomination, but apparently unwilling to combine his interests with Cameron, preliminary to the convention.

However, this refusal of Lincoln to confirm the Cameron-Lincoln ticket did not prevent Cameron's supporters in the Chicago area from publishing what may have been the first campaign pamphlet putting forth Lincoln as a candidate. It certainly did contain the first biographical sketch of Lincoln appearing in pamphlet form. This pamphlet in the Foundation library is entitled, *Address of the Cameron and Lincoln Club of the City of Chicago, Illinois to the People of the Northwest*, makes this final appeal:

"The nomination of Mr. Lincoln will secure us the votes of Illinois and Indiana and we hope to carry Oregon and California also. We may succeed with other candidates; with Cameron and Lincoln we will."

When Lincoln was enroute to New York in February 1860 for the Cooper Institute speech he stopped at Philadelphia and was handed the cards of Simon Cameron and David Wilmot just as he was leaving the city so did not have an opportunity to call on them. Possibly it is just as well that he did not contact them because he looked out on a different political horizon after the Cooper Union speech.

The young men who entertained him at New York were apparently thinking in the terms of a Seward-Lincoln ticket and Lincoln himself must have thought Seward to be more likely successful than Cameron. R. C. McCormick, a member of the committee who greeted Lincoln states that in conversation with an Illinois friend in New York makes it appear as if he had been approached by the Seward group as Lincoln said: "If they make me vice president with Seward, as some say they will . . ." and then Lincoln observed how this might affect him economically.

After Lincoln's trip into New England where he made eleven speeches, but none in Massachusetts which state had already come out favoring Seward, he returned to New York where he was again received by the young men responsible for his earlier visit. One of the committees is said to have advised him that when he came they thought he might make a good running mate for Seward, but after hearing him they were for him for the presidency regardless what happened to Seward.

Apparently Lincoln was still flirting with the vice presidency possibility as late as the opening of the Chicago convention. His friends at Chicago had a quantity of lithographs made from one of his pictures ready for distribution at the convention. The Foundation is fortunate in having one of these prints, once in the possession of George William Curtis, editor of *Harper's Weekly* who attended the convention. A penciled note by Curtis on the border of the print states: "These prints were showered through the Wigwam immediately after Mr. Lincoln's nomination May 1860." Why after the nomination? Is it not likely they were made ready for a later period in the convention, say the vice presidential contest with no provision made for an earlier distribution?

Professor James G. Randall draws the conclusion that one of the greatest threats to Lincoln's chances for the presidential nomination was that the efforts of his friends would be "sidetracked into the vice presidency." John Wentworth had advised Lincoln that putting forth a tremendous last minute effort "it should nominate you to one of the offices."