



Lincoln Lore

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WHEELER'S RECOLLECTIONS OF LINCOLN Lamon's Criticisms

In the May 7, 1885 issue of the Franklin County (Malone, New York) *Palladium* there appeared the "Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln" by William A. Wheeler. The author was vice-president of the United States (1877-1881) during the presidency of Rutherford B. Hayes. While he was known as a man of excellent character and of great liberality his "Recollections" aptly demonstrated that he was not a historian. On the other hand his critic, Ward Hill Lamon, whose biography of Abraham Lincoln was ghostwritten, revealed in his letters to Wheeler that he was familiar with the basic facts and important dates of Lincoln's life.

The editor of the *Palladium* in another column of the newspaper stated that the publication of the ex-vice-president's paper was the "realization of a hope vaguely cherished for some time . . . that . . . Wheeler might give to the world the store of delightful reminiscences which his friends know crowd his memory of a long public life, during which he held close relations with almost all those whose works enter most largely into our recent national history. The *Palladium* considers itself extremely fortunate in being able to give these reminiscences their first publicity through its columns."

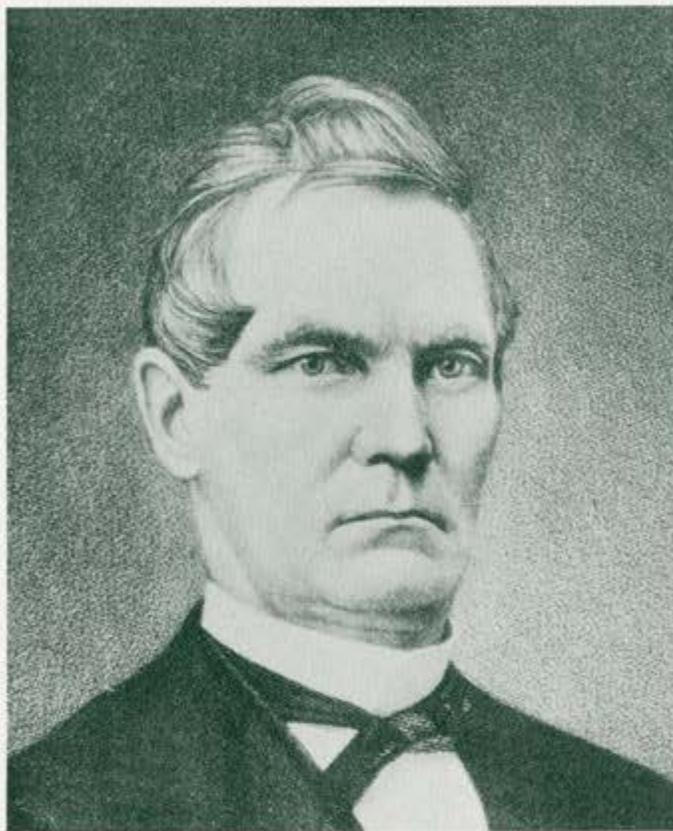
The extent of Wheeler's "Lincoln Recollections" measure fifty-seven inches of column wide newspaper type. The reader might conclude after perusing the reminiscences that a more appropriate title might be "Wheeler's Recollections of Wheeler." The "Recollections are signed with the initial "W."

Wheeler's eulogy on Lincoln which constitutes the first two paragraphs of his "Personal Recollections" follow:

"Whatever relates, even in a minor degree, to the characteristics of this towering figure in American history will always interest and command attention. The life which was ever calm in the midst of peril, hopeful when the darkest clouds lowered, patient under every abuse, courteous and kind to his bitterest foes, and yet inflexible when to yield was at war with his patriotic purposes—the life that battled so bravely, endured so heroically and constantly, and at last went out so tragically—all constitute a triumphal car in which Abraham Lincoln will ride down all the coming centuries.

"The idea for which his life was offered upon the sacrificial altar, in its progressive march, is leading the struggling masses of the old despotisms abroad—however slow may be the pace—to the attainment of that universal liberty and brotherhood which, as God reigns, is to be their ultimate heritage."

The vice-president's first contact with Lincoln was in Washington, D.C.: "I first saw Mr. Lincoln on a Sabbath morning in March 1861, on his first attendance in the New Avenue Presbyterian Church, then under the charge of Rev. Dr. Gurley—once a resident of St. Lawrence county. I was not prepossessed with his personal appearance, but thought I discovered in his face evidence of great kindness and determination of purpose, as well as of keen political shrewdness. He had already shown in his canvasses with Douglas that he possessed this last characteristic in a marked degree; and he subsequently demonstrated that he was the most astute politician, in the best sense of the word, that parties in this country



William A. Wheeler

Brown Brothers

have ever produced. No man has ever lived in our annals who knew better the ins and outs of the human heart."

In the election of 1860 Wheeler was successful in his race for Congress and his district was composed of the counties of Franklin, Clinton and Essex of the state of New York. With the patronage problem uppermost in his mind the forty-two year old congressman tried to seek an interview with the newly inaugurated president. This seemed virtually impossible until Wheeler met Orlando Kellogg of Essex County, New York. Kellogg had served in the 30th Congress (1847-1849) when Lincoln was a member from the state of Illinois. Kellogg assured the congressman that he could get him an interview with Lincoln. This was accomplished by Kellogg telling the door-keeper "to inform the president that Orlando Kellogg is at the door, and wants to tell him the story of the stuttering justice." Even though Lincoln was meeting with the cabinet all the business was laid aside while the humorous Kellogg related his story. Meanwhile Wheeler secured an appointment with Lincoln for the next morning.

Congressman Wheeler reciprocated Kellogg's kind-

ness a little more than a year afterward. Wheeler related the incident: "A young man—a private in one of the companies raised in Kellogg's neighborhood—had been convicted by military court of sleeping on his post, while on picket duty—a grave offence, and punishable with death, to which he had been sentenced. He was but nineteen years of age, and the only son of a widowed mother. He had suffered greatly with homesickness; and, overpowered at night with cold and watching, sleep overmastered him. He had always been an honest, faithful, temperate soldier. His comrades telegraphed his mother of his fate. She at once went to Kellogg, whose kind heart promptly responded to her request, and he left Washington by the first train. He arrived in that city at midnight. The boy was to be executed on the afternoon of the next day. Kellogg came at once to my boarding house, knowing that he could not pass the military guard about the White House at that hour. I had the pass of General Heintzelman, then commanding the defences of Washington. This was a necessity to me, as I was often called at every hour of the night to some city hospital to visit the suffering and dying. Dressing myself hastily, I went with Kellogg to the White House, easily passed the guard and reached the door-keeper, whom I well knew, and briefly telling him Kellogg's errand, asked him to take Kellogg to Mr. Lincoln's sleeping room—which he did. Arousing Mr. Lincoln, Kellogg in a few words made known the emergency. Without stopping to dress, the President went to a near-by room and awakened a messenger. Then sitting down, still in undress, he wrote a telegram to the officer commanding at Yorktown, to suspend the execution of the boy until further orders. The telegram was sent at once to the War Department, with directions to the messenger to remain until an answer was received. Getting uneasy at the seeming delay, Mr. Lincoln dressed, went to the Department and remained until the receipt of the telegram was acknowledged. Then turning to Kellogg, with trembling voice he said: 'Now you just telegraph that mother that her boy is safe, and I will go home and go to bed. I guess we shall all sleep better for this night's work.' The poor boy was soon pardoned, restored to his company, and a short time afterward was killed while fighting bravely at the battle of Fair Oaks."

The "Recollections" of Wheeler illustrate Mr. Lincoln's ingrained honesty and tenacity in the observances of his promises: "At its extra session in July 1861, Congress had passed a law authorizing the appointment of additional paymasters for the army. Before leaving Washington for home I asked Mr. Lincoln that I might name one of these. He promptly assented and directed his Private Secretary to make a memorandum of it. I desired the place for my old boyhood and life-long friend, Major John A. Sabin. Sometime in the following September I received a letter from the President, saying he had sent the appointment of Mr. Sabin to the Secretary of War, who would notify him to appear for muster into the U. S. service. October had passed and no notice came. A letter written to Secretary Stanton failed to bring a response. In the latter part of November, I went to Washington to attend the regular session of Congress, taking Mr. Sabin with me. The day after my arrival I waited upon Secretary Stanton, and called his attention to the appointment. He had no recollection of the matter, but told me in his brusque manner that Mr. Sabin's name would be sent in with hundreds of others to the Senate for its consideration. Earnestly I argued that Mr. Sabin had been appointed by the Commander-in-chief of the army, and that it was unjust to ask him to wait, perhaps the whole winter, the tardy action of the Senate upon his nomination, and that he was entitled to be mustered in at once. But all in vain. I got but this reply from the Secretary: 'You have my answer; no argument.' I went to the Chief Clerk of the Department and asked him for Mr. Lincoln's letter directing the appointment. Receiving it, I proceeded to the White House, although it was after executive hours. I can see Mr. Lincoln now as when I entered the room. He wore a long calico dressing gown, reaching to his heels, his feet were encased in a pair of old-fashioned, leathern slippers—such as we used to find in the old-time country hotels, and which had evidently seen much service in Springfield. Above these appeared the home-made, blue woolen stockings which he wore at all seasons of the year. He was sitting in a splint rocking

chair, with his legs elevated and stretched across his office table. He greeted me warmly. Apologizing for my intrusion at that unofficial hour, I told him I had called simply to ascertain which was the paramount power in the government, he or the Secretary of War. Letting down his legs and straightening himself up in his chair he answered: 'Well, it is generally supposed (emphasizing the last word) I am. What's the matter?'

"I then briefly recalled the facts attending Sabin's appointment, when, without a word of comment, he said: 'Give me my letter.' Then taking his pen he endorsed upon it: 'Let the within named J. A. Sabin be mustered in at once. It is due to him and to Mr. W. under the circumstances. A. Lincoln.' He underscored with double lines the words 'at once.' Armed with this Executive mandate, I called on Mr. Stanton the next morning, who on its presentation, was simply furious. He charged me with interfering with his prerogatives, and with undue persistence—perhaps as to the last not without some force, for I had wearied with the delay and was a little provoked by what I regarded as the 'insolence of office.' I told him I would call the next morning for the order to muster in. I called accordingly, and, handing it to me in a rage, he said: 'I hope I shall never hear of this matter again.' On the evening of this day I attended a reception given by Speaker Grow. Stanton was there, and crossed the room to shake hands with me, but made no reference to the occurrence of the morning. From that time he and myself were friends. I never asked anything of him that he refused. A feeble imitation of his own persistence won his regard."

Stanton must have made a deep impression on Wheeler as a powerful force in the Lincoln administration. He related a story about how "one persistent individual had hung about the White House, day and night, for a month for one of these (cotton) permits. At last, Mr. Lincoln, grown desperate, gave him the coveted document, saying at the same time: 'You will have to take it over to Stanton for countersigning.' With supreme exultation the happy man proceeded to the War Department and handed the paper to the Secretary. Stanton glanced at it for a moment, tore it into shreds and ground them under his feet. Naturally the man was greatly astonished and angered at the proceeding. Returning at once to Mr. Lincoln, he told him what had occurred. The president feigned great surprise and asked him to describe just how Stanton did it. Then after a moment's pause, he said: 'You go back and tell Stanton that I will tear up a dozen of his papers before Saturday night.'"

The last interview Wheeler had with Lincoln was at a small dinner party at the Executive Mansion. He related how the president seemed depressed, and did not display his usual humor. With the conversation turning mainly upon history and poetry, it was revealed that "Mr. Lincoln had a fancy for the weird poems of Ossian and recited snatches from one on the wars of Fingal." It was also recalled that Lincoln quoted from "Macbeth" and revealed to his friends that the poem that he loved best was William Knox's "Mortality." Wheeler closed his recollections with this statement: "How wonderfully and accurately descriptive (Knox's poem) of the closing of that great life."

Ward Hill Lamon, whose ghostwritten biography of Abraham Lincoln, published in 1872, had reaped a whirlwind of criticism, read Wheeler's "Recollections" with considerable astonishment. From Denver, Colorado, on May 23, 1885 Lamon wrote Wheeler: "A few days since, I had the pleasure of reading your 'Recollections of Lincoln,' from the Malone (N. Y.) *Palladium* wherein you say—'at the extra session of Congress in July 1861, a law was passed authorizing the appointment of additional pay-masters for the army,'—that the President assented your request that your life long friend Major Sabin, should be one of the appointees: that in September following, Mr. Lincoln wrote you saying he had sent the appointment of Mr. Sabin to the Secretary of War, who would notify him to appear for muster into the service. October passed and no notice:—then you say, a letter written to Secretary Stanton failed to bring a response: that in the latter part of November you went to Washington to attend the regular session of Congress, taking Mr. Sabin with you. You then say, 'The day after my arrival I waited upon Secretary Stanton etc.' You then detail the conversation had with Mr. Lincoln and the

fact of his making a somewhat imperative order to the Secretary to make the appointment 'at once.' You say: "I called on Mr. Stanton the next morning, who on its (the letter or order) presentation, was simply furious"—after this you speak of what was said and done by Mr. Stanton the Secretary of War.

"Allow me my Dear Sir, to assure you that I now, and always have entertained for you the most profound respect; and to express my sincere regrets that you were not President instead of Vice-President of the United States. I therefore venture to hope that you will pardon me for saying that I am unable to reconcile the statements purporting to be made by you, (alluded to above) with the historical fact that Mr. Stanton was not appointed Secretary of War until in January the year following, viz. 1862.

"It occurs to me that there must be a mistake made in your paper; either of dates or of name of the Secretary of War.

"I am certain that this irreconcilable statement was not made by you as was the blunder made by Sir Walter Scott in his *Ivanhoe* (Chap. 1) the date of this story as he says, 'refers to a period towards the end of the reign of Richard the First.' Richard died in 1199, nevertheless Sir Walter makes the disguised *Ivanhoe* style himself, 'a poor brother of the order of St. Francis', although the order of St. Francis was not founded until 1210 and of course the saint-ship of the founder had still a later date.

"If my recollection serves me correctly, Mr. Stanton, whose memory is now cherished by the great mass of the Republican Party: at the dates you speak of, that are referred to, was regarded as a Bourbon of the strictest sect:—up to the time of the capture of the Trent with Mason and Slidell, on the 8th of November. If Mr. Stanton had conceived any change of heart, and cessation of hostility to the administration, it never was publicly manifested. It was something over a month after this capture that he was consulted by Mr. Lincoln at the suggestion of Secretary Chase, as an international lawyer, as to the legality of the capture and arrest, which was the first interview had between Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Stanton since the commencement of the administration. This interview led to Mr. Stanton's appointment as Secretary of War. Mr. Lincoln had occasion for regrets about the Trent capture, but never for the capture of Mr. Stanton.

"The immortal Shakespeare (like yourself and others), sometimes got his dates confused; for instance: in his *Coriolanus*, he says of C. Marcius,—'Thou was a soldier even to Cato's will'—when in fact Marcius Coriolanus was banished from Rome and died over two hundred years before Cato was born.

"Again: his reference in the same play of Marcius sitting in state like Alexander:—the latter was not born for a hundred and fifty years after Coriolanus death.

"He also says in *Julius Caesar*:—"The clock strikes three"—when in truth and in fact there was no striking clocks until more than eight hundred years after the death of Caesar.

"Another in *King Lear*, in regard to spectacles:—spectacles were not worn until the thirteenth century.

"And still another inaccuracy in this immortal writers statements in his play of *Macbeth*, where he speaks of cannon:—cannon were not invented until 1346 and *Macbeth* was killed in 1054.

"You will excuse me for these citations for they are made in a spirit of playful illustration, to show how great minds often become confused about dates.

"What you have said,

I have considered, what you have to say,

I will with patience wait to hear."

"I read your "Recollections of Lincoln" with great interest, as I do everything I see written of that most wonderful, interesting and unique of all our public men that have ever lived on this continent. I sincerely hope you will receive this in the same kindly spirit that it is written,—prompted as it is by a curiosity to know how this variance about Mr. Stanton's official status during the first year of Mr. Lincoln's administration can be reconciled.

"I will regard it as an esteemed favor if you will drop me a line explaining it.

"Your interesting and graphic description of Mr. Lin-



From The Lincoln National Life Foundation

WARD HILL LAMON

Copy of an original photograph made in Washington, D. C., about 1886.

coln's pardon of the convicted and condemned soldier for sleeping at his post interested me very much. I have a curiosity to know whether this soldier's name was not William Scott. If Scott was his name, I have reason to believe he was the person whom Francis De Haes Janvier immortalized in verse. The poem can be found in a publication called, "One Hundred Choice Selections" No. 1 Page 13. Published by P. Garrett & Co., Philadelphia, Pa."

Wheeler replied to Lamon from Malone, New York on June 2, 1885:

"I thank you most sincerely for your letter of the 23rd ultimo, and for the friendly feeling you evince for me.

"I am simply mortified at my gross blunder and can only plead in mitigation the lapse of more than twenty years since the affair alluded to transpired, in which time aside from having performed a large amount of hard public and private work, I have experienced an amount of trouble exceptional to ordinary men, having buried every one near to me,—father, mother, brothers and sisters; I have no one left of nearer kin to me than cousins, and no one to care for my house except servants. For the last three years I have been an invalid, confined to my house and for a considerable portion of the time to my bed,—what wonder that 'the warder of the brain', should be sometimes at fault.

"The mistake must be one of time, for the actors in the transaction are too vividly impressed upon my memory to be forgotten until that faculty is wholly dethroned. I may be mistaken in the fact that Sabin accompanied me when I went on for the regular session in December 1861, but so sure was I of it, that before your letter I would have sworn to it. You have furnished me with a needed caution. It is unpleasant to find out that years are telling upon us, but it is healthful nevertheless. And so I may be mistaken as to the time intervening between the successive stages of the appointment. Sabin is somewhere in the west, and I will endeavor to find his whereabouts and get his statement of the facts. Br't. Brig. Genl. Chauncey McKeever, now Asst. Adj. Gen. of the

Army, was at the time in Stanton's office in a confidential capacity and I think will remember the transaction. We boarded together on F. Street with a Mrs. Nisbit at the time. I do not remember the name of the pardoned soldier. One of the Kellogg's sons lives in the northern part of the state. I will endeavor to get the name, and if successful will write you.

"Now my dear sir, mortified as I am, I feel almost compensated in having drawn from you such an admirable collection of anachronisms of famous literary men of the world. I am greatly interested in it and shall take the liberty of showing it to my literary friends. In your readings have you ever encountered the 'Deathless City' a beautiful poem written by Elizabeth A. Allen? I never saw but this single production from her pen.—who was or is she, and did she write other things?"

"My memories of Mr. Lincoln are a source of great pleasure to me. Many of them recall illustrations just a little 'off color.' In the 37th Congress was Mr. Valentine B. Horton from Ohio, a punctilious gentleman, highly observant of all the properties. He was at a (the) time going home and called on Mr. Lincoln to know what he might say to his constituents as to the prospects of the war. Mr. L. thought at the time that, owing to the disposition of our forces, we had a double advantage over the enemy and pointed out on the map, but wound up by saying he could best illustrate the situation by telling him the story of one of his Illinois neighbors, who upon being immersed, insisted that the minister should dip him twice. The response of the man as he came up the second time, would not bear publication. I doubt not you may have heard the story. If you ever come East, I wish you would come across Northern N. Y. and drop in upon me. I would greatly delight to live over the days of the war with you."

Lamon answered Wheeler's letter on June 15, 1885. His answer was exceedingly long and was filled with many references to literary matters, with a considerable number of stanzas of favorite poems incorporated into the letter. Lamon did, however, refer to Wheeler's anecdote of Lincoln (see letter of June 2, 1885) by stating: "I recall the anecdote you refer to—told by Mr. Lincoln to (Major General John Pope's father-in-law) Mr. Horton of Ohio—it like thousands of others he told which served to 'point a moral or adorn a tale'—would not bear the favorable test of polite criticism if published."

Lamon informed Wheeler of a new contribution he was making in the field of biography: "At the request of the editors of *The North American Review* I wrote a paper on Lincoln, which he acknowledged the receipt of and said it would appear in his Lincoln Series (whatever that may mean)—I presume it will appear in the July No. of that magazine, to which I would ask leave to call your attention."

Wheeler's "Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln," because of historical errors and confused chronology have never been republished in full, and do not constitute a major contribution to the study of the Sixteenth President.

In 1895 when A. C. McClurg and Company published Dorothy Lamon's (Teillard) "Recollections of Abraham Lincoln 1847-1865 By Ward Hill Lamon" her father's letter to Wheeler (May 23, 1885) and Wheeler's letter to Lamon (June 2, 1885) were incorporated into the book, even though they were drastically edited and in some cases considerably condensed. Lamon's second letter to Wheeler dated June 15, 1885 did not appear in this work. A complete transcript of the three letters came to the Foundation collection as a part of the Thompson Papers.

Today the name of Vice-President William A. Wheeler has been delegated to that limbo of lost men, the history books. On the other hand, Ward H. Lamon has best been remembered as a genial contemporary of the Sixteenth President, and not as a literary critic or careful historian.

ELECTIONS—1858

Without the slightest hint in regard to the historic significance of the Lincoln-Douglas debates and their bearing on the Illinois senatorial contest, *Harper's Weekly* on Saturday, November 13, 1858 reported on the state elections: "Since our last number went to press elections have been held in seven States. In five out of the number the Republican party has been successful.

In New York, Massachusetts, Michigan, Wisconsin and New Jersey the Republicans have carried all before them—here and there with the assistance of the Know-Nothings, but generally, as in the State of New York, without their aid and in defiance of their opposition. In Illinois there were three parties in the field—Douglas Democrats, Administration Democrats, and Republicans. The first of the three appears to have been successful; the last has been beaten. As for the Administration Democrats, they seem to have polled so small a vote that it is likely they will contend they did not run a separate ticket. Finally in the little State of Delaware, which sends one representative to Congress, the Administration has been successful."

AN OBSERVING OFFICE SEEKER GIVES HIS IMPRESSIONS OF LINCOLN'S INAUGURATION

On March 5, 1861 S. T. Hills wrote to his family at Canandaigua, New York, from Washington, D.C. and the original letter has recently been acquired by the Foundation. As the date of the letter would indicate Hills, who had apparently gone to Washington as a job seeker, had some interesting observations to report:

"I arrived here at daylight Friday morning and found Thomas Albright's residence. P. G. Albright has not yet arrived. I have just got a letter from Elizabeth saying that he has not got through court at Philadelphia on account of business connected with heavy mail robberies. She says he will come right on if he knows that I am here. She says she sent him word the time she wrote me so that I expect him soon. I saw old Abe safely in. He made a speech of about half an hour's length and was sworn in by Justice Taney. Abe talked as mild as possible under circumstances as you know by this time no doubt. No such confusion exists here as one would imagine by reading the papers at home. Perhaps the south did intend to take Washington yet I hardly think so. Everything passed off very quietly at the inauguration. No disturbance whatever that I could see. I stood perhaps within 50 feet of Lincoln and heard the whole. There was a great crowd but very orderly. Washington is quite a large city. It covers a great deal of ground. The streets are wide and it is called the city of Magnificent distances. I have been trudging back and forth all the while. The Public Buildings are scattered all over the city. This morning I went with the Pennsylvania delegation to visit General Scott, Secretary Holt, Dix, Attorney General Stanton and ———. Lincoln made a short speech in the east room about 2 or 3 hundred were present. Gen. Scott made a speech, quite a good one although the Gen'l was feeble. Washington is not so much crowded as one would suppose excepting a few large Hotels such as Willards, etc. Friday and Saturday I visited the Senate and House. I did not know many of the members. I knew Douglas, Seward, Sumner, etc. and a few of the house. The last day Saturday Joe Lane of Oregon made a long speech apparently to keep the Senate from business or to show himself off a very dull one. Everybody laughed and a great many went out. Thomas says the best plan for a person to do about getting an office is to get letters from the principal men at home to our representative. I don't know whether my names will suit P. G. when he comes or not. If T. Benin wrote the right kind of a letter to Woodruff it may do as well as to have one in my own hands and the Petition may be just as good. I shall know something about it I hope in a few days although the appointment may not be made for sometime.

"I shall wait before writing any more on this point awhile. An amusing thing occurred at the inauguration perhaps you have heard of a crazy man climb a tree just about half an hour before Lincoln made his speech. He made a loud and wild speech from the tree this was about 150 feet from the stand. A police officer climb up the tree and punched him with a cane. The fellow ran up the branches like a squirrel to the top and could not be persuaded to come down. They threatened to cut it down but nothing would start him everybody left the tree and he finally came down. It is getting dark and I must close."