



# Lincoln Lore

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## Lincoln And The Vice Presidency

*Editor's Note:* Dr. Louis A. Warren, formerly editor of *Lincoln Lore* has suggested or implied in several early issues (sixteen to be exact but primarily in 834, 1044 and 1419) that Lincoln might have aspired to the Vice Presidency of the United States (if the Presidency had not been available to him) and would have accepted such nomination if it had been tendered him by the Republican party in 1860. As this topic is so timely in 1968, and as so many of our present day subscribers do not have all of the early issues of the bulletin, it is thought to be appropriate to reprint excerpts from these early numbers which deal with this subject.

R.G.M.

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.

Apparently the Vice Presidency has always been made a sort of allurements to catch votes or bolster a presidential candidate's strength where fraternally or geographically he is weakest. Yet, the selection of a Vice President, who automatically becomes the head of the nation if disaster visits the White House, is usually made in a hurried session of a few political leaders, or even by one man who may assume the dictatorial effrontery to select for the people their potential leader.

Abraham Lincoln's popularity within the newly organized Republican party in the northwest might have thrust the Vice Presidential nomination upon him at the Philadelphia convention in 1856. Again in 1860 a concerted effort was made to make him the Vice Presidential nominee, but Lincoln's own strategy allowed him to evade this political pitfall.

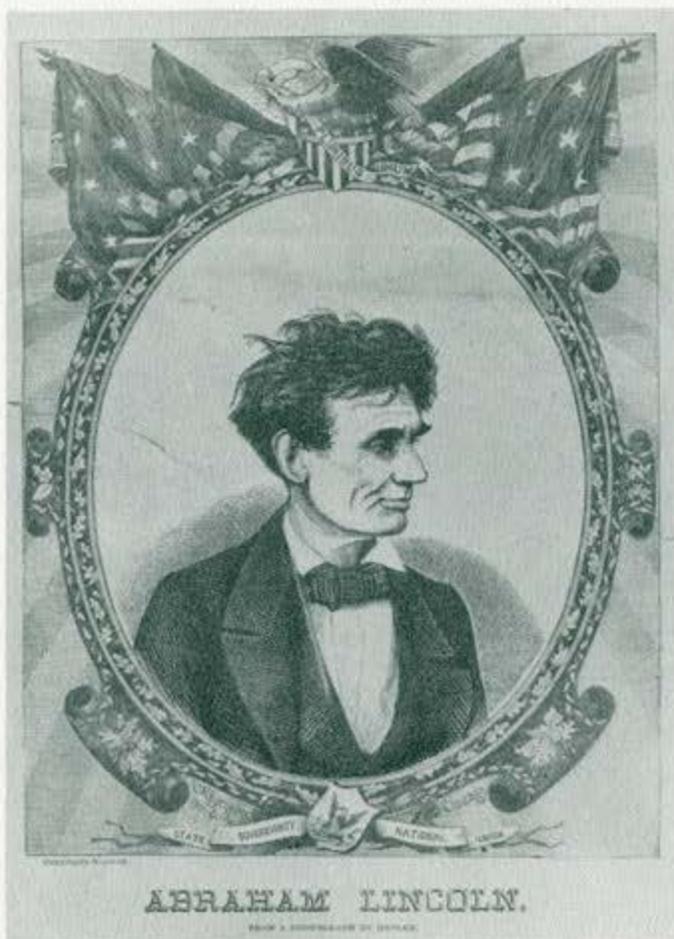
Among the most important episodes occurring in the political career of Abraham Lincoln, was his greeting of



*From The Historical Society of Pennsylvania*

Here, the first Republican National Convention met in the Musical Fund Hall on the south side of Locust Street (between 8th and 9th) in downtown Philadelphia. Lincoln received on June 19, 1856, 110 votes for the Vice Presidency, but William L. Dayton of New Jersey was nominated as Fremont's running mate.





From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

For a number of years the Foundation has had in its picture files this print of Abraham Lincoln made from a woodcut which bears the following pencil notation in the handwriting of George William Curtis: "These prints were showered through the Wigwam immediately after Mr. Lincoln's nomination, May 1860."

little doubt but what Lincoln's speech at Bloomington was the immediate cause for pushing him forward at Philadelphia, as a candidate for the vice-presidency on the proposed ticket of the newly organized party. It was the enthusiasm at Bloomington which carried over to Philadelphia and resulted in Lincoln catching the national eye. While still under the spell of Lincoln's Lost Speech, delegates from Illinois were planning to attend the first nation-wide convention of the party to be held in Philadelphia on June 19. There seems to have been little emphasis placed on the proximity of the Bloomington and Philadelphia dates, only three weeks intervening.

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. 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.

James H. Matheny is said to have told Henry C. Whitney that "Lincoln's first real specific aspirations for the presidency dated from the incident of his being named in the convention as a candidate for vice president." Whitney further states that on June 20th he was in court at Urbana with Judge Davis and Lincoln, and read to Lincoln from a Chicago paper of that date that Lincoln had received 110 votes for the vice-presidency on the Republican ticket. According to Whitney, Lincoln's only reaction to the news was: "I reckon that ain't me; there's another great man in Massachusetts named Lincoln, and I reckon it's him."

It does not seem possible that the building in which the first Republican Convention in America was held could become obscured so that it bears no external evidence, in the form of a bronze marker, of its historic

significance. The Musical Fund Hall where the Republicans convened in 1856 still stands in downtown Philadelphia, on the south side of Locust Street between 8th and 9th. While it is now used commercially, it is still in a fine state of preservation, and the interior lines of the auditorium have been more or less preserved in spite of a few partitions which have been erected.

The young Republican party of Illinois looked upon the 1858 senatorial contest as a real test of its strength, and long before the state convention was announced for June 19, Abraham Lincoln was generally accepted to be the candidate. Lincoln looked upon the canvass as a test of his own personal strength although votes would not be cast for him directly, but for candidates for the legislature who favored him.

After Lincoln's official nomination and the delivery of his "House Divided" acceptance speech, his fame began to spread throughout the nation, as revealed in some correspondence received by Lincoln from Charles H. Ray, then at Norwich, N.Y. Ray wrote in part:

"You are like Byron, who woke up one morning to find himself famous . . ." He further commented that even in obscure places he found "hundreds of anxious enquirers wishing to know all about the newly raised up opponent of Douglas . . . You have sprung at once from the position of a 'capital fellow' and a 'leading lawyer' in Illinois to the enjoyment of a national reputation."

The Lincoln-Douglas debates gave Lincoln nation-wide publicity. Here he had occasion to refer to the prominence of Douglas and then contrast his own position. He said, "All the anxious politicians of his (Douglas') party . . . have been looking upon him as certain at no distant date to be the president of the United States . . . On the contrary nobody has every expected me to be president."

The famous letter which Lincoln wrote to his friend, Dr. A. G. Henry, on November 19, 1858, which contains the clause, "Though I now sink out of view, and shall be forgotten" is made more striking by Dr. Henry's reply to it from Lafayette, Oregon Territory. It follows in part: "You will not 'sink out of sight' as you seem to anticipate, nor will you be forgotten. The people, the great and glorious people, will bear you on their memories until the time comes for putting you in possession of their house at Washington which they are bound to do in their own good time."

By the spring of 1859, Lincoln's political ambitions for some recognition in the 1860 campaign, began to send their roots down a little deeper. Apparently his note to T. J. Pickett of Rock Island on March 5, stating: "I do not think I am fit for the Presidency," was not very convincing because Pickett wrote to him a week later as to "the policy of announcing your name for the Presidency." The day after Pickett's communication, Salmon Portland Chase wrote to Lincoln as follows: "Permit me to congratulate you on the present aspect of the Republican cause." Then, referring to the debates he said, "The people will not forget the champion who merited, if circumstances did not permit him to achieve, victory."

Coming from such a prominent figure as Chase, this must have encouraged Lincoln to think of still further cultivating the good will of the people in nearby states. Possibly the most significant visit was to Chase's own state, Ohio. The reaction to his speeches was so enthusiastic that he could have had no further doubt about being "fit" for a presidential candidacy, at least. Sam Galloway wrote from Columbus on October 13: "His (Chase's) nomination for the presidency would sink us . . . Your name should be used in the canvass for candidates. Your visit to Ohio has created an extensive interest in you." A by-product of the Ohio visit was the publication of the Lincoln-Douglas Debates.

Early in October 1859, an editorial appeared in the *Lancaster (Pennsylvania) Examiner*, proposing Simon Cameron for President on the 1860 Republican ticket. Later in the month Lincoln received a letter from W. E. Frazer, a Pennsylvania Republican, stating the purpose of the friends of Simon Cameron to sponsor his nomination at the forthcoming Republican Convention. Lincoln replied to Frazer's letter on November 1, 1859, and referred to the proposed Cameron-Lincoln ticket as follows:

"I shall be heartily for it, after it shall have been nominated by a Republican National Convention; and

I cannot be committed to it before." To further clarify his position, Lincoln stated in the letter to Frazer, "I would not like the public to know, so I would not like myself to know, I had entered a combination with any man to the prejudice of all others whose friends respectively may consider them preferable."

The Pennsylvania editorial, suggesting Cameron and Lincoln as candidates, was reprinted, and the circulars were distributed in Illinois. One Chicago paper in its issue of November 14, 1859 stated that the ticket should be reversed to read, Lincoln and Cameron.

The Cameron and Lincoln Club of the city of Chicago was organized late in the year 1859, or early in the month of January 1860. Fernando Jones, who had been chosen chairman of the Executive Committee, wrote to Lincoln on January 10th asking for material for a brief sketch of his life. Lincoln replied five days later with these words:

"Our Republican friend, J. W. Fell, of Bloomington, Illinois, can furnish you the material for a brief sketch of my history, if it be desired."

There has come into the possession of the Lincoln National Life Foundation an item entitled, *Address of the Cameron and Lincoln Club of the City of Chicago, Illinois to the People of the North West*. It is 5½"x8¾" and contains eight pages. The article is signed by Fernando Jones. It was "published by order of the Club," by Charles V. Dyer, President, and Jo. W. Bell, Secretary.

Norman Judd, who had been largely responsible for having Chicago selected as the convention city, and who was one of the earliest of the ardent Lincoln supporters for the Presidency, addressed the Cameron-Lincoln Club in Chicago on February 10, 1860. Whether or not he spoke to win supporters for himself in the governor's race, or attempted to have the Club turn their ticket about face, we are not advised.

An interesting sequel occurred to the Cameron-Lincoln enterprise. On February 25th Lincoln was passing through Philadelphia on his way to New York to speak at Cooper Institute. Someone in Philadelphia, who was apparently on the lookout for Lincoln, handed him the cards of Simon Cameron and David Wilmot. The day following, Lincoln, then in New York, sent the following letter to Cameron:

"New York, Feb. 26, 1860.

"Hon. Simon Cameron:

"Dear Sir

"I write this to say the card of yourself, and Hon. David Wilmot, was handed me yesterday at Philadelphia, just as I was leaving for this city — I barely had time to step over to the Girard, when I learned that you and he were not at your room — I regret that being so near, we did not meet, but hope we may yet meet before a great while—

"Will you please forward the enclosed to Mr. Wilmot, as I do not remember his address?—

Yours truly,  
"A. Lincoln."

The organization more responsible than any other group for bringing Abraham Lincoln to the attention of the people was the Young Men's Republican Union of New York City. Their sponsorship of Lincoln's speech at Cooper Institute on February 27, 1860 brought him before the people of the East in a most favorable light and actually put him on the track for the Presidency. Preliminary to this eventful episode he had been merely vice-presidential timber. The significance of Abraham Lincoln's appearance at Cooper Institute has been somewhat obscured by the erroneous supposition that it was but a stop en route to visit with his son, then in school at Exeter, New Hampshire. By the time Lincoln received the invitation to visit New York the political importance of such an appearance outweighed filial considerations which he may have entertained. James A. Briggs, at the close of Lincoln's speech, was called upon for a comment and this is what he said:

"One of the three gentlemen, fellow-citizens, will be our standard bearers this year in the Presidential contest: the distinguished senator from New York, William H. Seward; the late able and distinguished governor of Ohio, Salmon P. Chase; or the 'Unknown Knight' who entered the political lists against the Bois-Guilbert of Democracy, Stephen A. Douglas, and unhorsed him—Abraham Lincoln."

The young men who entertained Lincoln at New York were apparently thinking in terms of a Seward-Lincoln

ticket, and Lincoln himself must have thought Seward to be a more likely successful candidate than Cameron. R. C. McCormick, a member of the committee that greeted Lincoln, states that a conversation which Lincoln had with an Illinois friend in New York makes it appear that 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 of what happened to Seward.

In November 1859 there was a concerted action on the part of Cameron's friends to line up Lincoln as Vice President on a ticket headed by Cameron. Henry J. Raymond declared that the speech at Cooper Institute "made Mr. Lincoln the second choice of the great body of Republicans of New York." Raymond further stated that in conversation with a friend in New York it is implied that Lincoln had evidently been approached about the vice-presidency. Possibly the same speech may have helped Horace Greeley choose his ticket composed of Dayton and Lincoln. One paper in the West was advocating Chase and Lincoln as a strong ticket.

Professor Randall in referring to Lincoln's chances for the presidency in 1860 after suggesting Lincoln's strength in the West, states that one of the threats that Lincoln had to guard against was that "The Lincoln movement would be side tracked into the vice presidency."

A few weeks before the Chicago convention, Lincoln replied to a letter from Samuel Galloway of Ohio, "My name is new in the field, and I presume I am not the first choice of a very great many. Our policy, then, is to give no offense to others,—leave them in a mood to come to us if they shall be compelled to give up their first love. This, too, is dealing justly with all, and leaving us in a mood to support heartily whoever shall be nominated." Lincoln's process of selling himself on the presidential idea was evolutionary and he gradually elevated his vice-presidential sights of 1856 to the presidential aspirations of 1860, not suddenly but gradually and with more assurance after the Cooper Union speech.

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, which was once in the possession of George William Curtis, editor of *Harp-er'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." Mr. Curtis' statement about the time element in the distribution of the pictures raises many questions. Why the picture of Lincoln, an active candidate for the Presidency, should not have been distributed before the presidential balloting, may have been another part of the Lincoln strategy of remaining not too "prominent." That Lincoln's followers already had them available for distribution before Lincoln's nomination is evident. It also seems likely that they had instructions as to when the copies were to be released.

The absence of any personal citation on the print about Mr. Lincoln arouses more interest than the printed data. There is no statement that he is a candidate for any office, and there is no mention of the Wigwam Convention. Could the pictures have been printed with the idea of using them in an emergency during the balloting for the Presidency? Or were they prepared primarily for the vice-presidency contest?—in case Lincoln should lose out in his quest for the higher office? Putting forth a tremendous last-minute effort at Chicago, John Wentworth had advised Lincoln, "It should nominate you to one of the offices."

The article "Lincoliana Auction Prices—1914" which was featured in the August issue and scheduled to be continued in this issue will be continued in the October number.