

# LINCOLN LORE

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## LINCOLN VIEWS THE NATIONAL POLITICAL ARENA

Before the year 1954 comes to a close it seems appropriate to try and utilize some of the centennial atmosphere of Abraham Lincoln's political rebirth, to begin a further study of his remarkable development. It will be recalled that in 1854 the Illinois frontiersman set in motion a skillfully self directed effort that within a period of six years made him the President of the nation. We shall be especially interested in this bulletin to review Lincoln's earliest attempt to gain a foothold in the national political arena.

When Abraham Lincoln became the law partner of John T. Stuart on April 22, 1837 he was undoubtedly aware of the fact that Stuart had run for Congress on the Whig ticket the previous year and was defeated. However, in December 1837 Lincoln in a letter to William A. Minshall commented that "Stuart will run again for congress." During this campaign, Stuart, unable to keep an appointment because of illness, sent Lincoln in his place to debate the issues of the campaign with Stephen A. Douglas, the opponent of Stuart. This opportunity to take an active part in the congressional campaign may have given Lincoln some notions that he too might some day become a candidate for congress.

On October 8, 1839, at a Whig convention in Springfield, Lincoln was chosen one of the five presidential electors in Illinois for William Henry Harrison. This task gave him a further interest in national politics and led to his first political address outside of the state. Stumping Illinois for Harrison as far south as Shawneetown on the Ohio, he crossed over the river into Kentucky and addressed a Whig gathering at Morganfield.

In Stuart's second campaign for congress he was elected and took his seat on March 4, 1839. Lincoln kept his partner at Washington informed about business matters and did not overlook advising him of the political situation also. As early as January 21, 1840 Lincoln wrote Stuart with respect to a second term: "I do not think anyone of our political friends wishes to push you off the track." A year later on January 23, 1841 Lincoln wrote to Stuart, "There is no sign of opposition to you among our friends. . . . Upon the whole I think I may say with certainty that your reelection is sure if it be in the power of the Whigs to make it so."

On March 1, 1840 however, Lincoln, who had been in the Illinois Legislature for three terms, did not believe that his own prospects for continuing in the legislature were very flattering, as he wrote to Stuart on that day, "I think it is probable I shall not be permitted to be a candidate." However, Lincoln was nominated for another term and elected. Stuart was also reelected to Congress and began his second term on March 4, 1841.

Ten days after Stuart's second term began the Stuart-Lincoln law firm which had been established in April 1837 was dissolved on April 14, 1841 and Stephen T. Logan joined with Lincoln in their legal interests. There may be some political significance to this change of partnerships as it might not be to Lincoln's advantage, if he had any congressional notions, to ask the people to nominate another member of the same law firm for an important office.

There is some indication that Lincoln was easing out of state politics in 1842 as his legislative term was coming to a close. After the Whig nomination convention had reported in April 1842 and Lincoln's name did

not appear among the candidates he wrote to a friend a day or two later: "Tell J. K. Dubois he must come to the legislature again, that I am off the track, and that the wheels of government will inevitably stop without the aid of one of us."

The census of 1840 changed the entire political picture for Illinois. As soon as the records were tabulated and laws passed to support the results of the increased population in many states, there was a great political revival. Especially in Illinois, where formerly but three representatives were sent to congress, now seven congressmen were to be chosen and elected. On March 1, 1843 the Illinois Legislature passed a law creating the Seventh Congressional District composing the counties of Sangamon, Putnam, Marshall, Woodford, Tazewell, Logan, Mason, Menard, Cass, Scott and Morgan.

Even before the district was legally created, it was very well known which counties would fall within the boundaries. On February 14, 1843 Lincoln had written to Alden Hull of Tazewell County, "Your county and ours are almost sure to be placed in the same congressional district." Lincoln then stated that he "would like to be its representative." Apparently some statement had been put in circulation that Lincoln was not interested in running for congress and on the same day as the above letter, he wrote to Richard S. Thomas of Virginia, Illinois: "Now if you should hear any one say that Lincoln don't want to go to Congress, I wish you as a personal friend of mine, would tell him you have reason to believe he is mistaken. The truth is, I would like to go very much. Still, circumstances may happen which may prevent me being a candidate. . . ."

On Monday, March 20, the Sangamon Whigs held their convention to select a candidate for Congress. After several ballots had been cast Lincoln made the first of what was to become a long series of "personal withdrawals," and Edward Baker was chosen. Lincoln was selected, however, as one of the eight delegates to the convention. He wrote Joshua Speed that in helping Baker get the nomination at the convention, "I shall be fixed a good deal like a fellow who is made a groomsman to the man what has cut him out, and is marrying his own dear 'gal'."

Lincoln gives an interesting account of the factors which worked against him and allowed Baker to win the Sangamon nomination. In a letter to an old New Salem friend written on March 26, 1843 he said: "It would astonish if not amuse, the older citizens of your County, who twelve years ago knew me as a stranger, friendless, uneducated, penniless boy, working on a flat boat—at ten dollars per month to learn that I have been put down here as a candidate of pride, wealth, and aristocratic family distinction." This attitude was probably due to the fact that about five months before, Lincoln had married Mary Todd, a member of a family with prominent Springfield connections.

Lincoln also stated that the church interests were back of Baker and "levied a tax of a considerable per cent upon my strength throughout the religious community."

It seems almost paradoxical that Lincoln should be prevented in his first attempt to enter the National Political Arena by having his social background reversed and his high moral character discounted.