



Lincoln Lore

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The Troublesome Border States: Two Previously Unpublished Lincoln Documents

The Lincoln Library and Museum is proud to announce the acquisition of two previously unpublished endorsements by Abraham Lincoln. Both concern Border States, and together they suggest a policy pursued by the Lincoln administration

in the first year of the Civil War. Both letters of recommendation were written on the same day, but Lincoln acted on them at different times.

THEN AND NOW.
SHOWING WHAT THE REBELS HAD WHEN THEY BEGAN THEIR WICKED REBELLION AND WHAT THEY NOW HOLD.
IS THE REBELLION GAINING OR LOSING GROUND?

Rebel cruisers rob emigrants on shipboard, after deceiving them with the "Old Flag." (side the Tallahassee). The "Peace" Democracy are determined to concede to the Rebels whatsoever they demand, including the right not only to buy and sell black women and children in the Southern States, but also to rob and plunder Post-War emigrants on the sea. McClellan is the candidate of the "Peace" Democracy, and promised the slaveholders of Virginia that he would use Non-Resistant Force in his army to put down any movement by their slaves in favor of Liberty in aid of the Union. We say "Peace" Democracy because they are for letting the South secede, and retaining only a "Peace" of the old Union for the Loyal States.

Rebel Franklan Pierce, Democratic ex-President, "regrets that his ill health prevents his joining the Rebel armies."

Rebel: When the Rioters of New York were burning Orphan Asylums and hanging innocent workers to lamp posts, they were elected, on a boozehouse for Jeff. Davis and McClellan. The "Pro-Slavery Peace Democracy" would make McClellan President, and after they had hanged the negroes would then kill off (or try to) all the Anti-Slavery white men of the country. This is the sort of Peace the McClellan Democracy advocate.

The gray and black portions of the map denote the Territory held by the Rebels when they fired on SUMTER. The black portion denotes what they now hold. Verily, the Rebellion is being subdued, and the "Old Flag" is again making glad the eyes of the people all over the Old Union. Let the good work go on till Treason is crushed and LIBERTY, LAW, and JUSTICE triumphant.

VOTE FOR LINCOLN AND LIBERTY, AGAINST McCLELLAN AND SLAVERY.

NO TURN OVER

FIGURE 1. This strongly worded piece of 1864 campaign literature exaggerated the success of Northern armies in the war by exaggerating the amount of "Territory held by the Rebels when they fired on SUMTER." All of the gray and black areas allegedly belonged to the Confederates in 1861. The map serves well to indicate the importance of the larger Border States and documents the common assumption, North and South, that the Border States were more Southern than Northern in spirit.

From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

The Letters

House of Rep.
 Jan'y 9. 1861. [1862]

To the President of the U. S.

Dr Sir

Maj Wallen of the U. States Army has seen much service. He is a Southern man, by birth and has faithfully adhered to his allegiance amid the treason of his Southern associates of the army & I hope his fidelity may be rewarded, by honorable promotion. We have but few Southern Born men in the service,

Very resply your frined [sic]
 C A Wickliff

I sincerely wish Major Wallen could be relieved from going to New-Mexico—

A. Lincoln

Jan. 20. 1862.

House of Representatives.
 Washington City Jan'y 9th 1862.

To His Excellency

A. Lincoln, President U. S.

Sir,

Permit us to recommend to you for appointment, as a Major in one of the new Regiments of the Regular Army, Major Thomas E Noell of Missouri. We desire to say in reference to Major Noell, that he is a gentleman of the highest order of talent, with a liberal Education, and an unspotted character. Before the commencement of our present troubles, Major Noell, was engaged in the successful practice of the law, enjoying the confidence of the Courts, the Bar, and the whole community. Early in September, he enlisted as a private in the first Volunteer company, raised in South East Missouri, was made a first Lieutenant, and when enough Union State troops, were raised for a Battalion, he was unanimously chosen by the officers as Major, in which capacity he has served ever since. He has been in Camp with his men the whole time, acquired proficiency in the drill and by his energy skill and courage, has protected seven or eight counties, from the lawless depredations of the Secession hordes, of the Swamp region. We feel that Missouri is entitled to a respectable appointment, in the New Regiments of the Regular Army, and in Major Noell a Native born citizen of Missouri, we feel that we should be so represented, that our State would be honored, and the public service greatly promoted.

We confidently hope that our application for his appointment will be promptly granted.—

We remain Most Respectfully

Your Ob't Sev'ts
 James S. Rollins
 E. H. Norton
 Thos. L. Price
 R Wilson
 Wm A Hall
 Jno W Noell
 J. H. Henderson

I have a personal acquaintance with Major Noel [1] and am confident that if he should receive an appointment in the army he will not only serve the country well but will distinguish himself in the service

H. R. Gamble
 Gov. of Mo

Washington
 Jan 27. 1862

Respectfully submitted to the War Department, with the remark that, while I know not if there be a vacant Majority, I shall be quite willing the applicant within recommended shall have it, especially as it is said Missouri has had no appointments in the new Regular Army.

A. Lincoln

Feb. 1, 1862.

[Docketing in another hand]

Major Thos E. Noell

Missouri

Major U. S. A.

Recommended by
 The President
 Hon F. P. Blair
 "Jas. S. Rollins
 Gov H. R. Gamble

1 Enclosure

Lincoln and the Border States

"I think to lose Kentucky is nearly the same as to lose the whole game," wrote President Lincoln to Orville Hickman Browning on September 22, 1861. "Kentucky gone," he continued, "we can not hold Missouri, nor, as I think, Maryland. These all against us, and the job on our hands is too large for us. We would as well consent to separation at once, including the surrender of this captiol."

As James A. Rawley has argued, these were not the sentimental musings of a son of the Border. There were hard population and geographical facts to back them up. The white population of the eleven Confederate states was 5,451,000. Kentucky's white population was 919,484; Missouri's was 1,063,489; and Maryland had 515,918 white inhabitants. The total for these three Border States alone was 2,498,891, or just under half the total population of the Confederacy. Despite a tremendous population differential between North and South (about 22 1/2 million to 5 1/2 million or to 8 3/4 million counting slaves), the South held on for four years and came close to European recognition, stalemate, and independence. With the differential at 20 million to 10 1/4 million (counting slaves), the results might have been very different. In fact, that 2:1 ratio is reminiscent of the old saw about population in America's successful revolution of 1776, in which a third of the population, estimated to be actively interested in the patriot cause, won independence for the whole nation from Britain.

Geographically, Kentucky was of great strategic importance. With the Ohio River as a northern boundary, the Confederacy would have had a "natural military frontier" from the Atlantic to the Missouri River. A Confederate Missouri would have made control of the Mississippi River, a key aspect of Northern strategy, much more difficult. Kentucky's sentimental influence was significant as well. Missouri had 100,000 citizens born in Kentucky; Illinois had 60,000 (including the President of the United States); Indiana had 68,000; Ohio had 15,000; and Iowa had 13,000.

Lincoln's policies towards Kentucky have been much studied and written about. He followed a policy of appointing loyal men to governmental positions in Kentucky, whether they were Republicans or not and whether they held slaves or not (most often they were not Republicans, for Kentucky's Republican party was tiny and feeble). For a brief period, he blinked at Kentucky's announced policy of neutrality which was surely as illegal as secession. He supplied arms to Union men in Kentucky secretly, and he avoided coercion of the state until the Confederates invaded it, thus placing the onus of firing the first shot in Kentucky on the Confederacy rather than the Union. This gave the North a great psychological advantage.

As Harry J. Carman and Reinhard H. Luthin point out in *Lincoln and the Patronage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), much of the Lincoln administration's Kentucky patronage involved military commissions. They argue that he took care to fill the officerships with good Union men, but that

he tried to fill military appointments in Kentucky with men who had some connection with the state, that is, men who were Kentucky residents or who had been born in Kentucky. They could have added that he tried to cement Kentucky to the Union cause by making military appointments recommended by influential Kentuckians.

The point of C. A. Wickliffe's letter of recommendation for Major Wallen was that Lincoln must appoint Southern-born men to the United States Army, rather than that Kentucky must have only Southern-born officers operating within its borders. By 1862, then, Border State policy included efforts to tie their loyalties to the Union, not by leaving them alone, but by giving their region appointments in the United States Army.

Henry D. Wallen was not apparently a Kentuckian, however. When his son was appointed to West Point in 1862, he was listed as a Georgian. Wallen was a Regular Army captain when the war began and was serving on the Pacific coast. In the autumn of 1861, he was promoted to Major of the Seventh Infantry, but he had friends in high places and, as soon as he received his promotion, these friends were urging further promotion — to Inspector General or Brigadier General. President Lincoln wrote a memorandum as early as December 4, 1861, reminding himself that Wallen was being pushed for higher rank. On January 18, 1862, Senator John J. Crittenden of Kentucky, Senator Henry S. Lane of Indiana, Senator John P. Hale of Maine, and Senator James W. Nesmith of Oregon called on President Lincoln, begging him not to send Major Wallen to New Mexico. Lincoln then wrote a strongly worded recommendation to Secretary of War Stanton that he not be sent. Two days later, Lincoln endorsed Congressman Wickliffe's request on Wallen's behalf. On the same day that the Senators called on Major Wallen's behalf, Lincoln ordered "it to [be] definitely settled" that Henry D. Wallen, Jr., presumably the Major's son, be one of the ten at-large appointments to become a cadet at West Point. This request was obeyed, and young Wallen entered the United States Military Academy that year.

Major Wallen did not fare as well. He served for two years in New Mexico, fighting Indians and Confederate sympathizers in that far-off and rather inglorious sideshow to the great Civil War. Lincoln's wishes could be overridden. But the administration's "Southern strategy" was at work. Of the ten at-large appointments to West Point, four came from slave states.

Charles A. Wickliffe's influence with the administration would fade. Wickliffe (he spelled his name with an "e," but he went blind late in his life, and the approach of this condition may account for the bizarre spelling and handwriting in his letter) was born in Kentucky in 1788. He had served in Congress practically forty years before Lincoln received his recommendation for Major Wallen. He had been a Whig and served in John Tyler's Cabinet. During the Civil War, Wickliffe, a Union-loving moderate, became a leader of Unionist sentiment in Bowling Green, Kentucky. Joshua F. Speed recommended Wickliffe in May of 1861, as a safe recipient of the arms that were being distributed secretly in Kentucky to Union men. In the first year of the war, then, he was grouped with the likes of the Speed family, James Harlan, and Garrett Davis as a loyal bulwark in a shaky and doubtful state.

Loyalty to the Union "as it was" was as far as Wickliffe's loyalty extended, however. When President Lincoln began in the spring of 1862 to urge the Border States to adopt a plan of emancipation within their borders, he raised constitutional objections. By 1863, he was so alienated from the measures of the Lincoln administration that he became the nominee for Governor of Kentucky on the Peace Democratic platform,

which decried the Federal government's usurpations of Kentucky's constitutional liberties. In a rare letter to his wife, President Lincoln commented on Wickliffe's loss of the election to Unionist Democrat Thomas Bramlette: "Old Mr. Wickliffe got ugly, as you know, ran for Governor, and is terribly beaten."

Wickliffe's career is proof of the wisdom of Lincoln's Border State policies. In the early months of the war, the President cooperated with even Democrats like Wickliffe as long as they sought to keep the Union together. Once Kentucky was safely in the Union fold, the inertia of constitutional boundaries and legalities kept her on the North's side despite the extreme unpopularity of emancipation within this slave-holding state. If a few strong-willed and independent old men like Wickliffe refused to change their principles, the state did not waver, and Wickliffe lost in a landslide. Had the Lincoln administration followed a policy of tampering with slavery from the start of the war, Kentucky, as Holman Hamilton has argued, would doubtless have seceded with Virginia and the rest of the upper South.

Two of the new appointments to the Military Academy hailed from Missouri, and the administration favored candidates for office championed by men from this Border State as well. Reinhard Luthin and Harry Carman argue that Missouri was firmly in the Union bag by August of 1861, and that Lincoln's patronage worries in that state thereafter stemmed from an enormous feud between conservative politicians of the Edward Bates, Francis P. Blair, and Hamilton R. Gamble stripe and more liberal politicians like John C. Frémont and B. Gratz Brown.

The Lincoln administration, as much by accident as anything else, was firmly the captive of the conservative faction. Edward Bates, who had been one of Lincoln's rivals for the Presidential nomination, became a Cabinet member, as did Lincoln's other major rival William H. Seward. Hamilton R. Gamble, the Governor of Missouri, was Bates's brother-in-law. Lincoln's Postmaster General was Montgomery Blair, who deserved inclusion in the first Republican President's Cabinet because of his important contributions to the founding of the party and because the Blair family in general represented the interests of Democrats who became Republicans. Francis P. Blair, Jr., was Montgomery's brother. Through his Cabinet, then, Lincoln had close ties to the one faction in Missouri. The other faction, identified for a time with the career and charisma of John C. Frémont, represented a rival Republican interest in the Presidency which Lincoln never succeeded in conciliating. Indeed, the only reason Frémont had a command in Missouri was that he had once been thick with the Blairs, and they persuaded Lincoln to appoint him. Later, Missouri proved to be too small for the ambitions of both Francis Blair and Frémont, and the two became bitter factional rivals.

Major Thomas E. Noell's name came before Lincoln with impeccable factional credentials. Hamilton R. Gamble and Francis Blair were leaders of the faction, as was Congressman James S. Rollins. More important than Noell's factional identification at this juncture in the war, at least from President Lincoln's point of view as opposed to that of the politicians within Missouri, was the simple fact that he came well recommended by a Border State delegation. This seems to have been persuasive, for on April 1, 1862, Thomas E. Noell became a captain in the Nineteenth Infantry, United States Army.

Thomas E. Noell was being recommended for promotion by his own father, John Noell, who was a member of the Missouri delegation in the House of Representatives. John Noell died in Washington in 1863, before his term ended. In 1864, his



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

FIGURE 2. Francis P. Blair, Jr.

son resigned his commission and ran successfully for his father's former seat. Thomas Noell won reelection and, like his father, died in office.

Doubtless the word was out in Washington that a way to gain an appointment from the Lincoln administration was to represent a slave-state interest that could perhaps be won to the Union side. Lincoln noted in the case of Noell that the appointment was of special merit if it were true that there were no Missouri men in the new units of the Regular Army. Major Wallen, on the other hand, had influential friends all over the Union, but it is interesting to note that his friends followed up their pleas for saving his career from the obscurity of the New Mexico theater of war by having Kentuckian Charles Wickliffe urge the Major's cause on the ground that there were too few Southern-born men in the Army.

The story of the Border States always serves to impress us with the speed with which political events in the Civil War moved. Although it is fashionable to think that a policy of emancipation was arrived at at a snail's pace, the view from the Border suggest quite the opposite. One must keep in mind that slavery was an institution over two centuries old in a country that was fifteen years short of one century old. The United States was no nearer abolishing slavery on April 13, 1861, than it had been one, two, or three decades before. In fact, the chances of doing away with the peculiar institution without war were far slimmer in 1861 than in the first fifty years after the American Revolution. As Lincoln figured out and said repeatedly, as far as slavery was concerned there had been no progress, only decline, from the conditions of the early days of the republic. Recent studies of the economic health of the slave economy indicate that it was thriving, and its racial purpose never changed.

To look at the Civil War through a Kentucky prism is to see

events fairly hurtling past. If the Kentucky legislature had been sitting on April 14, when Sumter was fired upon, she might well have left the Union with the other four Southern states which did so for that reason. In May, Lincoln was smuggling guns into the state to any Democrat who seemed to want to keep Kentucky out of the Confederacy. The President ignored the state's illegal neutrality. By the Fourth of July, Lincoln attacked neutrality as showing "no fidelity to the Constitution," but he sent no Union troops to Kentucky. Even after Unionists won the August elections for a new state legislature, Lincoln kept only Kentucky soldiers in Kentucky. When John C. Frémont issued an emancipation order in Missouri on August 30, some Kentucky soldiers threw down their guns and went home. Within a week, the Confederates stupidly invaded Kentucky. The legislature then abandoned neutrality and took active measures to support the North.

In just a year from this time, Lincoln would identify his administration with a policy of emancipation. And he wasted very little time in broaching the subject to the slave-holding Border. In six months Lincoln was advising the Border States to get rid of slavery; he sugared the pill by offering compensation. Kentucky turned the offer down, and it was Kentucky Congressmen especially, among them Charles Wickliffe, who raised objections to the plan in a meeting of Border State Congressmen with Lincoln on March 10, 1862.

The price Lincoln paid was unpopularity. McClellan took Kentucky in a landslide in 1864, 61,000 to 26,000, and, as Holman Hamilton has said, in spirit Kentucky then joined the Confederacy. For practical military reasons, however, Lincoln's cautious early policy of giving the reluctant Border disproportionate attention paid off, and Missouri and Kentucky helped more than they hindered the effort to keep the nation from falling apart.



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FIGURE 3. John C. Frémont