

Office-seekers at Washington in 1861.

(Interview with Dr. William Jayne, Springfield, Ill.,
October 22, 1898.)

When I went to Washington in 1861, three days before the inauguration of Lincoln, the capital was full of office-seekers, and during the month or more that I remained there they besieged the White House daily. Being one of their number—I was a candidate for the office of Governor of the Territory of Dakota, which I secured—I saw much of the place-hunters. Many of those who sought places were, like myself, the President's personal friends. Some he had known long and intimately; ~~many~~ they had been his associates in politics or on the circuit, and had served him faithfully in years gone by. All were men whom he was glad to serve to the extent of his power. This applied particularly to the distribution of patronage in Illinois, where the President faced the perplexing necessity of choosing between tried and true friends.

I recall an ~~interesting~~ incident which illustrates this embarrassing situation. A gentleman named ~~Talcott~~ Talcott wanted to be postmaster at Rockford. He had been a State Senator and had cordially supported Lincoln for United States Senator.

"The situation is just this", said the President to Talcott: "I want to appoint an old friend of mine, Alex. Simpson of Hancock County, United States Marshal for the Northern district; but Congressman Washburne is pressing J. Russell Jones of Galena for the place. Now, if, ~~I~~ at Washburne's request, I make Russell Jones United States Marshal, I will give you the postoffice at Rockford."

This was satisfactory. It was not long until Russell Jones

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was appointed marshal. Talcott expected his appointment as postmaster to follow as a matter of course.

Then, as now, it was the time-honored custom that the Congressman, if a member of the dominant party, should designate ~~the~~ all postmasters appointed for his district. Congressman Washburne stood upon his rights, refused to endorse Talcott, and demanded the appointment of another man. Lincoln was much chagrined and Talcott was wrathful.

Talcott,

"Mr. Lincoln", said ~~he~~^{are}, "I have seen the day when I was as important to you as you ^{are} now important to me."

Lincoln was manifestly confused, for he felt his obligation to Talcott. A little later Washburne's man was appointed postmaster, and Talcott went home, vastly discouraged, not to say disgusted. Lincoln, of course, was quite as much disappointed; for circumstances, not his own preference, dictated the choice. However, he did not forget Talcott, for when the internal revenue system was created he gave him the lucrative office of revenue collector.

J. McCan Davis.