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Lincoln's Visit to Rochester

EDITOR'S NOTE: The "Thrift Advocate" is greatly indebted to the City Historian, Mr. Edward R. Forman; his assistance and generosity have made this article and accompanying pictures possible.

IN the early sixties Rochester was a small but thriving city whose total population was but 47,896 people. Streets considered now as quite central were then in the outlying districts of the city—yes, out in the country in those days. On the north the city extended but a short distance beyond what is now Edgerton Park, and on the other side of the Genesee River, Clifford Avenue (that is, what there was of it at that time), completed the northern line. On the east, Goodman Street bounded the city, and to the south Mount Hope Cemetery, Genesee, York, and Child streets formed the western line.

Thus was the city bounded and large portions now familiar in name and location were never thought of, perhaps never dreamed of. Much of that part of the city in which today most of our schools are located was farm land, and the total of public schools was but seventeen as compared to the more than sixty schools of today. Four thousand, seven hundred and seventy-seven pupils attended the seventeen public schools of 1861, as compared to the more than 52,000 pupils in the schools of today. Thus was Rochester, indeed, a tiny city as compared to the Rochester we know.

Abraham Lincoln had been elected President of the United States in November, 1860, and following his election events of

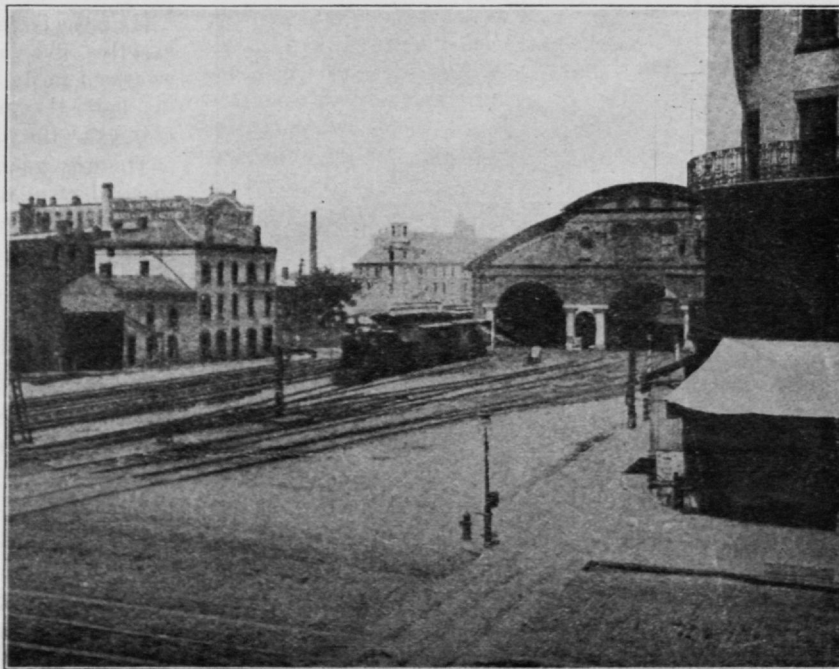
the gravest and most startling character came in quick succession.

Seven Southern states, filled with military spirit and preparing for war, had formed an independent confederacy, and the other slave-holding states were wavering and expected to follow. The treasury was empty. The army and navy were small and scattered, and some of the forts and other national property were already in the hands of the seceders. The fate of the Union seemed dark. Business everywhere was depressed. The North was far from being united. Many would gladly have joined in an attempt to revolutionize the government by preventing Lincoln from taking his seat, and it had been widely hinted by his enemies that his inauguration would not be permitted. The South hoped that by the 4th of March their confederacy would be so

well established that the new administration would abandon its purpose of coercion. From the date of his election, Lincoln, during those eventful days, made no public utterance on national affairs, and the country was anxiously awaiting an expression from him indicating his course of action in view of what had transpired.

This was the state of affairs when Lincoln bid good-bye to his friends and neighbors in his home town of Springfield, Illinois, on February 11, 1861. These facts are related because their recollection is a necessary explanation of the intense popular interest which that journey to Washington excited, and aids us to understand the feeling in Rochester when it was announced through the press that Lincoln would stop here for a few minutes and address the people who came to greet him on Monday morning, February 18, 1861, at 7:35 o'clock.

He was to arrive in the city via the New York Central Railroad, whose tracks were in their present location, although not elevated, but approached the station at street level. The brick station, a little more than a train shed, occupied what is now Central Avenue. Adjoining it on the south was the Brackett House, which occupied the present Central Avenue fire houses. West of the Brackett House and south of the railroad tracks was Congress Hall, now known as the Bristol Hotel. It was noted



STATE STREET AND CENTRAL AVENUE AS LINCOLN SAW IT.

for its famous meals, and during the days before dining cars all trains made a twenty minute stop for the purpose of allowing travelers to appease their appetites. The Waverly Hotel adjoined Congress Hall on the west and is also still in use under the name of "The Savoy."



Plaque on Central Ave. Near Mill Street Marking Spot Where Lincoln Spoke.

On Monday morning, February 18th, the special train bearing Mr. Lincoln and his family, his two secretaries, and about twenty other persons, including Mayor Scramton of Rochester, left the New York Central station in Buffalo, at 5:48 a. m., and reached here at 7:35, which in the middle of February is a rather early hour for most people. A remarkable thing in connection with Mr. Lincoln's visit was the fact that his train made the run from Buffalo to Rochester in one hour and twenty-seven minutes, actual running time. The actual running time of the fast express trains today is one hour and twenty-two minutes, or five minutes faster than the wood-fed engine came sixty-one years ago.

Elaborate preparations were made by Rochester citizens to receive their distinguished visitor. A committee headed by Mayor Scramton boarded the train at Buffalo to extend the welcome of their city to the President-elect. Decorations of all kinds covered every spot. The entire fronts of the Waverly Hotel and Congress Hall were covered with bunting, and flags were displayed all along State Street. On the west end of the station was an enormous canvas bearing the inscription, "Welcome to the President-Elect." The train was to halt at State Street, and Mr. Lincoln was to be escorted to the lower balcony of the Waverly Hotel and there address the people.

Hours before the train arrived or before the sun arose thousands of people poured in from all over the city and county to get a glimpse of the man in whose hands the people had chosen to place the destiny of the country in those troubled times. The Perkins Silver Band had been hired and assembled, and awaited the order to strike up "Hail, Columbia," as the train pulled in. Fifteen thousand people were ready to extend their welcome.

At exactly 7:35 the signal was given that the train was in sight, and the cannon of the Grays on Falls Field began the salute. The train was drawn by the locomotive Dean Richmond, and consisted of two cars. It came slowly through the dense mass of people and went into the station so that the platform of the rear car projected a few feet. Mr. Lincoln appeared on the rear platform with Mayor Scramton and was introduced. He received a warm reception and a universal shout of wel-

come. Lincoln bowed in acknowledgment, and a perfect stillness ensued as he prepared to speak as follows:

"Fellow citizens: I confess myself, after having seen many very large crowds during the past week, astonished at this immense multitude of people gathered here at so early an hour in the morning. I must say that it is the largest assemblage I have met since I started on my journey. I am very grateful to you for this opportunity to meet you and for this demonstration of your regard. I am not vain enough to believe that you are assembled from any wish to see me as an individual, but because I am for the



The New York Central Station in 1861 The Arch on the right is the one thru which Lincoln's train passed.

Picture loaned thru courtesy of Seth C. Jones

time being the representative of the American people. I could not if I would address you at any length. The time allowed for my stay among you will not admit of it. If I should make extended remarks at every place where my fellow citizens are assembled to meet me I should not reach the capital in time for the inauguration. Therefore I appear before you simply for the purpose of greeting you and to bid you farewell. It is a great gratification to me to see you and I heartily thank you for your kindness."

Here the train started, having stopped exactly five minutes. The crowds swarmed in its rear, shouting and waving hats, the president standing in the rear gracefully bowing his adieu.

He was gone. Rochester was never to see him again.

SAVE

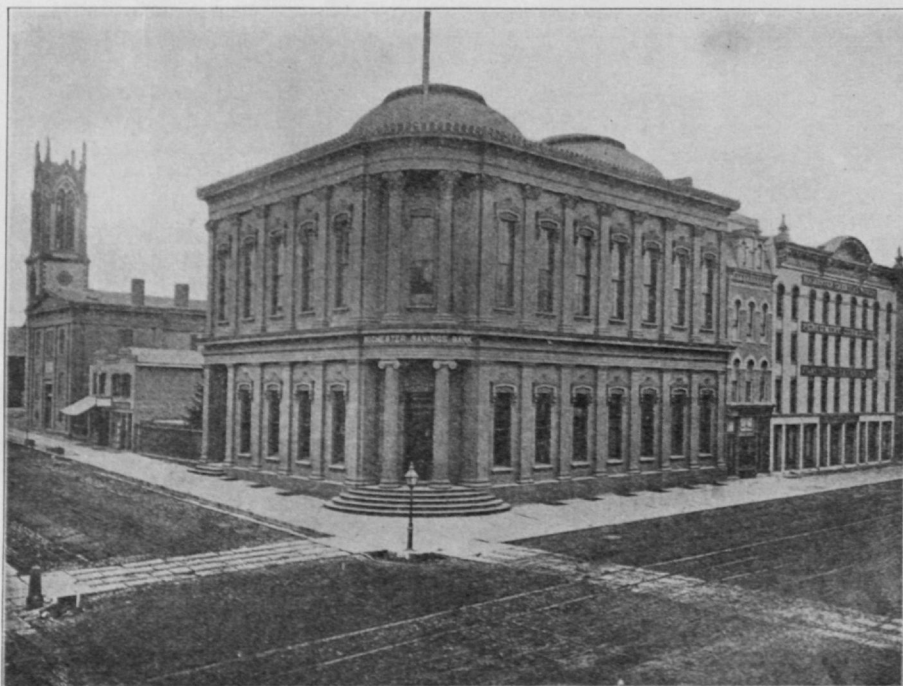
A brand new year has just begun,
The time for resolutions,
And if it's hard to think of one,
I'll give you some solutions.

Each week some pleasure deny yourself,
Maybe in fun or candy,
And the money that you save that way
Will some day come in handy.

The Savings Bank will help you save
And care for all your treasure,
And if they keep it long enough,
Will pay you in fullest measure.

MARJORIE SMITH,

5A, No. 7 School.



The Rochester Savings Bank as it looked when Lincoln came to Rochester in 1861.