

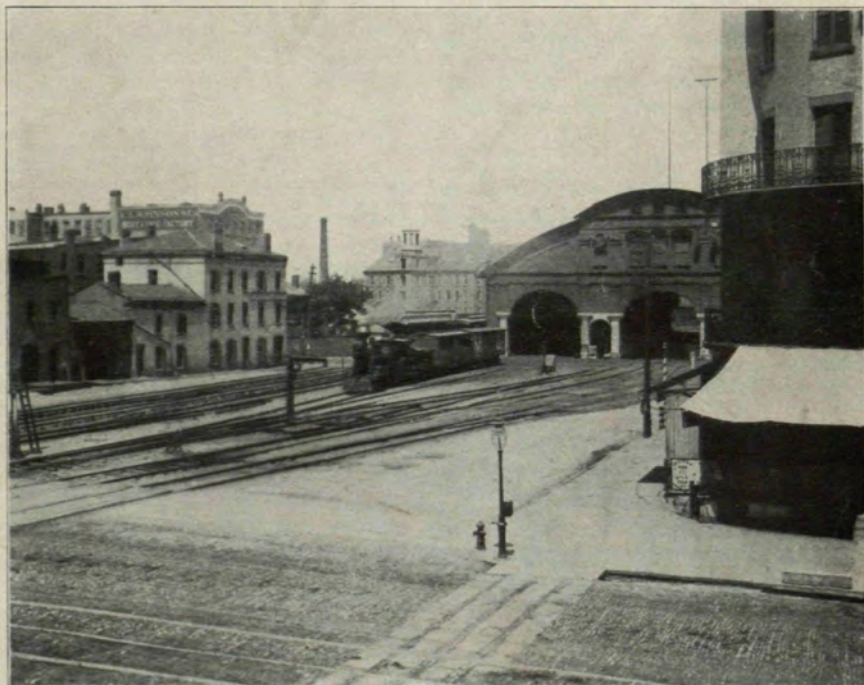
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LINCOLN IN ROCHESTER

A MEMORABLE JOURNEY.



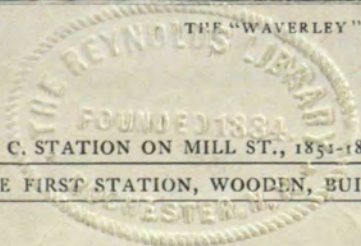
By CHARLES H. TRUE.



RAILROAD AVENUE

THE "WAVERLEY" CORNER, STATE STREET

THE OLD N. Y. C. STATION ON MILL ST., 1851-1883, WHICH
REPLACED THE FIRST STATION, WOODEN, BUILT IN 1840







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Lincoln in Rochester

A Memorable Journey

CHARLES H. TRUE

(In Rochester Post Express February 11, 1909)

Ten years ago this month the following letter with the signature and address of a Capital city woman was received in Rochester:

Albany, N. Y., Feb. 20, 1899.
The Mayor of the City of Rochester,
N. Y.:

Dear Sir—Can you tell me the date of the day in February, 1861, that Abraham Lincoln passed through your city on his way to Washington? Do you know any one of your older citizens who heard him make an address from the train to the people gathered there in the depot on that morning? I shall feel under great obligations to you if you can help me to to any data of that occasion.

The Mayor's office made numerous inquiries, and, being unable to obtain information other than that Lincoln did not pass through Rochester at all, caused the Albany letter to be printed in the Rochester daily papers where it attracted much attention and interest. With the letter was published a statement by an old resident that Lincoln did not pass through Rochester on his way to Washington, nor over the Central railroad, but went east by way of Harrisburg. The writer of the present article, having personal knowledge of the facts and knowing that there must have been many other equally competent witnesses still living in Rochester and vicinity, expected to see this followed by a flood of personal testimony on the subject. But, instead of that, other old residents arose who knew that Lincoln did not come this way, giving good reasons why he could not have done so, and one of the papers made similar statements editorially. On February 29, 1899, the

present writer broke into print with a communication published in the "Democrat and Chronicle" of that date, testifying that the Albany woman was quite right in her premises; that Lincoln did pass through Rochester upon that memorable journey; relating some of the details in connection with his appearance in Rochester in the early morning of Monday, February 18, 1861, and his brief address delivered from the rear platform of his special train to the thousands assembled at the west end of the old Mill street station to which the writer listened when a small boy. In the same issue the "Democrat and Chronicle" contained an extended editorial corroborating my statement and commenting on the preceding controversy. Thereafter, other old residents got into a reminiscent mood and appeared with their personal recollections of the occasion.

Of course there never should have been any extended uncertainty regarding the event, and in view of the records at hand it is surprising that the question which arose remained unsettled a day. The controversy is interesting as showing how even extraordinary events can in the course of a few years be clouded by forgetfulness and doubt. Here was a local event which attracted widespread attention at the time, was witnessed by thousands, and read about by other thousands of contemporaries in an age of printing and printed reports. That in the short space of thirty-eight years, on the spot where it occurred, in the same populous, modern city, it should become a matter of

so much doubt seems remarkable, and to a thoughtful observer has an obvious bearing upon the valuation of ancient happenings, alleged or denied, in ignorant, superstitious and credulous ages, before the days of printing, and recorded or denied generations after the death of all the witnesses.

The journey of President-elect Lincoln from his home in Springfield, Ill., to the capital of the nation, to assume duties and responsibilities the most momentous which ever confronted a president began on February 11, 1861. The preceding campaign had been of the most exciting character. The younger generation of to-day which has only witnessed latter-day campaigns must have small realization of the depth of popular feeling and enthusiasm awakened in 1860. Following the election, events of the gravest and most startling character came in quick succession, and before the time for Lincoln's inauguration, secession long threatened was an accomplished fact. 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 national government in all its departments was permeated by disloyalty more or less pronounced. The treasury was empty. The army and navy were small and scattered, and some of the forts and other national property were already in possession of the seceders. The fate of the Union seemed dark and ominous and the country was filled with feverish apprehension. Business everywhere was depressed. Mayor Fernando Wood in his address of official welcome to Lincoln at New York, February 20th, said (referring to New York city): "All her material interests are paralyzed and her commercial greatness is threatened." The North was far from being united. Southern sympathizers were scattered over it who were loud and bitter in their denunciations of Lincoln and urgent in their demands for peace at any price. 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 weak Buchanan had timidly shrunk from any attempt to throttle the infant rebellion, and in the main the status quo was being maintained upon the surface by both governments until the new administration should define its policy, the South hoping 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 had during these 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 things when Lincoln bade adieu to his home friends and neighbors in a brief and pathetic address, which, like all his utterances en route, was telegraphed over the land. I have referred to these well-known facts regarding the existing conditions of the country because their recollection in this connection is a necessary explanation of the intense popular interest which that journey from its beginning to its end excited throughout the nation, and because it aids us to understand why in Rochester when the city had less than a quarter of its present population over fifteen thousand people assembled on a winter's morning, before daylight, many coming from long distances, who could only expect at most to see and hear for five minutes the man charged with the destiny of the nation in such a crisis. Throughout the entire route the people assembled in great numbers at the successive stations and wherever he appeared, accorded him the highest testimonials of respect, business being suspended in many places. The legislatures of the states through which he was expected to pass had officially invited him to appear before them. The principal addresses west of Rochester were made at Indianapolis (before the legislature); Cincinnati, Columbus, (before the legislature); Pittsburg, Cleveland and Buffalo. He remained in Buffalo, over Sunday, where he attended the Unitarian church with former President Millard Fillmore.

On Monday morning, February 18th. the special train bearing Mr. Lincoln and his family, his two secretaries and about twenty other persons, including the mayor of Rochester, left the New York Central station at Buffalo at 5.48 a. m. and reached Rochester at 7.35, which in the middle of February is a rather early hour with most people.

To the younger readers it may here be well to explain that this was before the day of the elevation of the railroad tracks in Rochester, which were then at street grade; that there was no "Central avenue" between Mill and North Water streets, and that what is now Central avenue between Mill and

and waving hats, the President standing in the rear of the platform gracefully bowing his adieu. A moment later he had gone and the multitude slowly dispersed. It is said that there were thousands in State street who were unable to obtain even a glimpse of Mr. Lincoln.

In reading the report of the event in the Rochester Union and Advertiser of that day, I am struck by the reporter's fine recognition of a characteristic of Lincoln's personality which so many noted in after years. The report says: "The personal appearance of Mr. Lincoln is more agreeable than his pictures and history led us to believe. He is not handsome by a great many degrees, but has not that hideous, ugly look which his portraits give him. When standing before an audience listening to a speech of welcome he shows a countenance of indifference and want of expression, but when he speaks there is an instant change in his entire expression. Few men that we have ever seen exhibit so great a change in going from the passive to the active condition—in passing from silence to free utterance."

A change, however, had taken place in Lincoln's personal appearance since those campaign portraits with which the people had become familiar were made. Fifty years ago photographic portraiture had not reached its present state of perfection, and reproductions by photographic processes in the newspapers were unknown. In the campaign of 1860 the popular conceptions of the personal appearance of the candidates were almost wholly derived from cheap lithographs and engravings which gained nothing when reproduced by brush artists on campaign banners. Previous to the fall of that year Lincoln wore no beard and campaign art had in him a hard subject. When we see some of his alleged portraits of that period, especially the crude wood cuts which appeared in the newspapers, some of which would have libeled a Modoc savage, we marvel at his election. How the change referred to happened was publicly explained by Mr. Lincoln on Saturday

afternoon preceding his appearance in Rochester, during a short stop of his train at Westfield, N. Y. After some remarks Mr. Lincoln stated that during the campaign he had received a letter from a young girl of that place in which he was kindly advised and admonished to let his whiskers grow; and as he had acted upon that piece of advice, he would now be glad to welcome his fair correspondent, if she were among the crowd. In response to this call a lassie of fourteen made her way through the crowd, was helped on the platform, and was kissed by the President. Little Grace Bedell did not "change the map of the world," but she did change for all future ages the world's image of one of its greatest historical characters.

After leaving Rochester, Lincoln made brief remarks at Syracuse and Utica, reaching Albany at half past two in the afternoon where he spoke from the steps of the capitol and in the Assembly chamber before the Legislature. On Tuesday morning he left Albany, reaching New York city at 3 o'clock, where he remained until Thursday, the 21st. After brief speeches at Jersey City and Newark, he appeared before the legislature at Trenton. The party reached Philadelphia at 4 o'clock, where he assisted in raising the national flag over Independence Hall and made several addresses. After a short stop at Lancaster he reached Harrisburg on the 22nd, where he addressed the Pennsylvania legislature. At Harrisburg, the deviation from the schedule and his secret passage through Baltimore were decided upon on account of a plot to assassinate him in the Maryland metropolis. The next morning the whole country was surprised to learn that Lincoln had arrived in Washington twelve hours sooner than had been intended.

On April 27, 1865, the body of the dead president was brought through Rochester on its way to Springfield, a large crowd of people having assembled in and about the depot when the train arrived at 3:20 o'clock, a. m.

Pittsford, N. Y., Feb. 10, 1909.



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