

# LINCOLN LORE

No. 99

Fort Wayne, Indiana

March 2, 1931

## LINCOLN LORE

BULLETIN OF  
THE LINCOLN  
HISTORICAL  
RESEARCH  
FOUNDATION



ENDOWED BY  
THE LINCOLN  
NATIONAL LIFE  
INSURANCE  
COMPANY

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### LINCOLN'S FUNERAL MARCH

The story of a march, played by a band during the funeral obsequies of Abraham Lincoln at Springfield, was related during the Lincoln Assembly program at the time of the dedication of the Lincoln Historical Research Foundation, February 11, 1931. The narrator of the story, Mr. Frank B. Taylor, of Fort Wayne, recalled the fact that it was his father, Robert Stewart Taylor, a Fort Wayne man, who wrote the music and words of the march prior to Lincoln's demise.

The song, "O Wrap the Flag Around Me, Boys!" which purports to be the words of a dying soldier of the Union army, was written in either late 1861 or early 1862, when the composer was twenty-three years of age. It was first published in the "Silver Lute" in 1862 and about the same time in sheet music form. The "Silver Lute," a singing book for schools, academies, and juvenile classes, was compiled by George Root and published by Root and Cady of Chicago. Immediately upon its publication the song gained immense popularity. It is said that the piece is still sung at the burial of Civil war veterans.

Not only is it interesting to know that the march was composed by a Fort Wayne citizen, but also that Capt. Wilbur F. Heath, the leader of the band at the time of Lincoln's funeral, later became an instructor in music in the Fort Wayne schools. It was thus that the son of the composer of the march, when he was a school boy, met Captain Heath. Mr. Taylor relates that at one time having mentioned to Heath that his father had written a number of songs in previous years, he was requested to name some of them. "The first one that occurred to me," states Mr. Taylor, "was 'O Wrap the Flag Around Me, Boys!'"

Mr. Heath then replied with much enthusiasm that he had been the leader of the band which, at the time of Lincoln's funeral had marched in the procession at Springfield and played that tune. Thus it was that the composer learned, by a chance remark of his son, who was then a schoolboy, of the honor that had been bestowed upon his work.

But of Heath we know that he also

composed a dirge that was played during the funeral ceremonies. The Bloomington, Illinois, *Pantagraph* for February 1, 1931, carries a story of the musical score that is still in possession of the composer's widow, Mrs. Kate Aull Heath. The *Pantagraph* states that "Mrs. Heath hopes to have the composition adopted as a national dirge to be played throughout the nation on each Memorial day."

Heath, who enlisted in the Union army at the age of twenty-one, was a resident of Waukegan, Illinois. Citing the *Pantagraph* again, we find this statement of Heath's regiment:

"Being the most complete regiment available at the time, the one hundred forty-sixth regiment Illinois volunteer infantry, was selected as the guard of honor at Lincoln's funeral. This unit was organized in September, 1864, after regimental bands had been discontinued and brigade bands were authorized. The regimental band was organized, however, purely for the pleasure of the group without interference with the regular duties of the soldier.

"This is the band that headed the procession that accompanied President Lincoln's body from the Alton depot to the state house, where it lay in state until the funeral.

"General Hooker was so impressed with the appearance of the band that he gave orders that it should head the procession at the funeral and he directed that all previous arrangements should be cancelled.

"The procession formed to view the body was two abreast and under guard of the soldiers of the one hundred forty-sixth regiment. The procession started at 10 a. m., May 3, 1865, and was never broken until 10 a. m., the next day. Yet thousands of persons were unable to view the body.

"The members of the band and the instruments they played were: Capt. W. F. Heath, bandmaster, E flat cornet, enlisted at Waukegan; Steel, E flat cornet; Marsh, E flat cornet; James Gates, B flat cornet, enlisted at Waukegan; Charles Mann, bass drum, enlisted at Waukegan; Chester Marr, B flat cornet, enlisted at Waukegan; O. W. Shepherd, E flat alto, enlisted at Waukegan; Thomas Masters, E flat alto, enlisted at Mt. Carroll; Hodges, B flat tenor, enlisted at Mt. Carroll; Sweet, snare drum, and James Shepherd, E flat bass, enlisted at Mt. Carroll; E. L. Bartlett, B flat baritone, enlisted at Morris, Seneca Tearts, B flat tenor. Mr. Bartlett was the father of Jessie Bartlett Davis, the famous singer."

Following the war Captain Heath became a teacher of music and, as a writer of music, he achieved considerable fame. At one time his "Heath's Elementary Music Reader" was officially adopted by the Indiana school

authorities. He was also a frequent contributor to *Etude*, the magazine of music. For eighteen years he was supervisor of music in the Fort Wayne schools and he also became president of the National Music Teachers' association as well as a member of the board of examiners of the American College of Music. He gained much prominence and recognition in the musical world.

"Following the funeral of Lincoln, Captain Heath placed the dirge he had written in a case and locked it up, declaring that there would never be another man like Lincoln and that the dirge should never be played again.

"This vow was once broken while he was a bandmaster at the Danville soldiers' home. It was played by his band at the ceremonies at the home following the death of President McKinley at the urgent request of the governor, Col. Isaac Clements.

"Innumerable attempts have been made to purchase the composition from Mrs. Heath, but she has refused all offers and has steadfastly refused even to permit anyone to inspect the document."

Words of song, "O Wrap the Flag Around Me, Boys."

1

O, wrap the flag around me, boys, To die were far more sweet,  
With Freedom's starry emblem, boys, To be my winding sheet;  
In life I lov'd to see it wave, And follow where it led,  
And now my eyes grow dim, my hands Would clasp its last bright shred.

2

O, I had thought to greet you, boys, On many a well won field,  
When to our starry banner, boys, The trait'rous foe should yield;  
But now, alas! I am denied my dearest earthly prayer,  
You'll follow, and you'll meet the foe, But I shall not be there.

3

But, tho' my body moulder, boys, My spirit will be free,  
And every comrade's honor, boys, Will still be dear to me.  
There, in the thick and bloody fight, Ne'er let your ardor lag,  
For I'll be there, still hov'ring near, Above the dear old flag.

### CHORUS

Then wrap the flag around me, boys, To die were far more sweet,  
With Freedom's starry emblem, boys, To be my winding sheet.

Both words and music written by Robert Taylor of Fort Wayne, Indiana, late in 1861 or early in 1862.