

# LINCOLN LORE

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## LINCOLN AT NIAGARA FALLS

With the approach of summer and the vacation period, one begins to consider the scenic attractions which America has to offer. Possibly no single natural phenomenon has had the magnetic interest over a period of so many years as Niagara Falls.

On at least two occasions Abraham Lincoln visited Niagara. The old Cataract House established in 1814 has available the old guest registers and on a page dated July 24, 1857, one may find this entry:

"A. Lincoln & Family, Springfield, Illinois."

Mr. Lincoln's family at this time consisted of Mrs. Lincoln and three sons: Robert, age fourteen; Willie, age seven, and Tad, age four. That this was a very pleasant occasion for Mrs. Lincoln is evidenced from a letter dated September 20 (1857), which she wrote to her half sister, Emilie Todd Helm: "The summer has so strangely and rapidly passed away. Some portion of it was spent most pleasantly in traveling East. We visited Niagara, Canada, New York, and other points of interest."

While this trip East was primarily a business trip for Mr. Lincoln, it is one of the few instances when we find the Lincoln family traveling with the idea of pleasure and sight-seeing in view and there is every evidence that Lincoln thoroughly enjoyed it.

Nearly ten years before this visit of the Lincoln family Abraham Lincoln himself had stopped off at Niagara on his way home from a speaking itinerary in New England. His last engagement was in Boston on Friday, September 22, 1848, when he spoke at a Whig rally held in Tremont Temple. The following day he started west and stopped at Albany. From there he went on to Niagara, where for the first time evidently he looked upon the wonder of the falls.

Lincoln at various times gathered data on several different subjects which he worked into popular discussions such as Temperance, Law, Agriculture, etc. The best-known of his popular addresses was the one on Discoveries and Inventions. He usually returned to some political theme, however, and when he wrote to the committee which had invited him to speak at Cooper Union in New York on February 27, 1860, he said: "I guess I will make a political speech of it."

Possibly while at Niagara Falls he may have made the notes which he planned to use in a lecture; and it is of interest to observe in the fragmentary memorandum available the reaction of Lincoln to America's greatest natural wonder.

### FRAGMENT—NOTES FOR A LECTURE

#### *Physical Appearance of Falls*

"Niagara Falls! By what mysterious power is it that millions and millions are drawn from all parts of the world to gaze upon Niagara Falls? There is no mystery

about the thing itself. Every effect is just as any intelligent man, knowing the causes, would anticipate without seeing it. If the water moving onward in a great river reaches a point where there is a perpendicular jog of a hundred feet in descent in the bottom of the river, it is plain the water will have a violent and continuous plunge at that point. It is also plain, the water, thus plunging, will foam and roar, and send up a mist continuously, in which last, during the sunshine, there will be perpetual rainbows. The mere physical of Niagara Falls is only this. Yet this is really a very small part of that world's wonder."

#### *Emotional Appeal of Niagara*

"Its power to excite reflection and emotion is its great charm. The geologist will demonstrate that the plunge, or fall, was once at Lake Ontario, and has worn its way back to its present position; he will ascertain how fast it is wearing now, and so get a basis for determining how long it has been wearing back from Lake Ontario, and finally demonstrate by it that this work is at least fourteen thousand years old. A philosopher of a slightly different turn will say, 'Niagara Falls is only the lip of the basin out of which pours all the surplus water which rains down on two or three hundred thousand square miles of the earth's surface.' He will estimate with approximate accuracy that five hundred thousand tons of water fall with their full weight a distance of a hundred feet each minute—thus exerting a force equal to the lifting of the same weight, through the same space, in the same time. And then the further reflection comes that this vast amount of water, constantly pounding down, is supplied by an equal amount constantly lifted up, by the sun; and still he says, 'If this much is lifted up for this one space of two or three hundred thousand square miles, an equal amount must be lifted up for every other equal space'; and he is overwhelmed in the contemplation of the vast power the sun is constantly exerting in the quiet noiseless operation of lifting water up to be rained down again."

#### *Falls Reveal Record of the Past*

"But still there is more. It calls up the indefinite past. When Columbus first sought this continent—when Christ suffered on the cross—when Moses led Israel through the Red Sea—nay, even when Adam first came from the hand of the Maker: then, as now, Niagara was roaring here. The eyes of that species of extinct giants whose bones fill the mounds of America have gazed on Niagara, as ours do now. Contemporary with the first race of men, and older than the first man, Niagara is strong and fresh today as ten thousand years ago. The Mammoth and Mastodon, so long dead that fragments of their monstrous bones alone testify that they ever lived, have gazed on Niagara—in that long, long time never still for a single moment (never dried), never froze, never slept, never rested."