

# LINCOLN LORE

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## LINCOLN'S SUMMER HOME

Abraham Lincoln was urged on several occasions, in the hot summer months during the year he occupied the White House, to take a vacation. In August, 1864, while in conversation with President Lincoln, Governor Randall inquired, "Why can't you seek seclusion, and play the hermit for a fortnight? It would reinvigorate you."

"Ah," said the President, "two or three weeks would do me no good. I cannot fly from my thoughts—my solicitude for this great country follows me wherever I go. I do not think it is personal vanity or ambition, though I am not free from these infirmities, but I cannot but feel that the weal or woe of this great nation will be decided in November."

In the month of March, 1865, less than one month before the President's assassination, Mrs. Lincoln accompanied Mr. Lincoln to City Point. She said in a letter to a friend, "I cannot but devoutly hope that change of air and rest may have a beneficial effect on my good husband's health."

The removal of the Lincolns to the Anderson cottage at the Soldier's Home for a short time each summer was of distinct advantage to Mr. Lincoln and his wife refers to it as a place of solitude.

Before the Lincolns occupied the home it was known as the Anderson cottage named in honor of Major Robert Anderson. Although established by Gen. Winfield Scott, it was largely due to Anderson's personal effort that steps were taken to improve the Soldier's Home and a spacious building was erected for their accommodation. It was intended for the quarters of old and disabled soldiers of the regular army. By the year 1888 as many as two thousand men were located there.

It is strange that more attention has not been given to the historical importance of the Anderson cottage which was occupied four summers by the Lincolns and which still stands in Washington.

The summer White House of President Lincoln was erected in 1810, one hundred and twenty-five years ago; and it has undergone few improvements. It is a stone structure two and one-half stories high and contains twelve rooms. It is a house of many gables and this has its distinct advantage as a summer retreat as many of the rooms in the various wings have windows on three sides. The bedroom used by Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln is such a room, and has two large windows over the entrance facing the drill grounds.

A spacious porch extends along the front of the house and a balcony can be entered through one of the second story windows. One who visited the home while the Lincolns were living there described the location of the building as follows:

"The Soldier's Home is a few miles out of Washington on the Maryland side. It is situated on a beautifully wooded hill, which you ascend by a winding path, shaded on both sides by wide-spread branches, forming a green arcade above you. When you reach the top, you stand between two mansions, large, handsome, and substantial, but with nothing about them indicative of the character of either. That on your left is the Presidential country-house; that directly before you, the 'Rest' for soldiers who are too old for further service."

The environment of the building occupied by the Lincolns has been somewhat changed. The Soldier's Home Park, as it is called, now occupies 512 acres about four miles from the capitol and directly north of it. It is northwest from the White House. On the reservation there may be observed five dormitories, a hospital, chapel, library, and several other buildings. The capitol dome can be seen from the lawn of the Anderson cottage.

Evidently the most exciting days which the Lincolns spent at the summer White House were in July, 1864, when news was broadcasted that the Confederate military leader, Early, was approaching the City of Washington. The people who lived out in the Maryland villages beyond the Anderson cottage came flocking into Washington over the old Seventh Street Road past the presidential summer home. The rebel cannon could be heard but ten miles away; and the President and his family were staying at the Anderson cottage, which was situated in the path of the approaching army, about half way between the outer line of fortification at Fort Stevens and the city.

When Secretary Stanton learned that the enemy was within striking distance of where Lincoln was located, on Sunday night, July 10, he ordered that the President should return to the White House and sent a carriage for him. Lincoln went back to town against his own will and was very indignant when he learned that a small navy vessel had been made ready in the Potomac for his escape, in case the Confederate troops entered the city.

Many interesting stories are told about Lincoln's riding back and forth over the four-mile route between the White House and the Soldier's Home. He did not like to be bothered with the military escort which Stanton insisted should accompany him. He said the tramp of the horses feet made so much noise he couldn't hear himself think. On one occasion it is said Lincoln was fired at from ambush; at another time there was a dash alone into the city at midnight.

The most significant historical incident associated with the summer White House is related in a story which Frank Carpenter tells about his conversation with Abraham Lincoln with reference to the finishing of the second draft of the Emancipation Proclamation. It has been accepted generally as authentic and used by Nicolay and Hay in their compilation of Lincoln's works. Lincoln had decided to follow Seward's suggestion that the proclamation be withheld until some victory was registered by the Union troops. Carpenter's version of what Lincoln told him follows:

"Finally came the week of the battle of Antietam. I determined to wait no longer. The news came, I think, on Wednesday, that the advantage was on our side. I was then staying at the Soldier's Home (three miles out of Washington). Here I finished writing the second draft of the preliminary proclamation; came up on Sunday; called the Cabinet together to hear it and it was published on the following Monday."

Here at the Anderson cottage the proclamation as it was presented to the Cabinet was prepared. This fact should be memorialized in some appropriate way.

Ford's Theatre has now become a museum where items associated with the assassination of Abraham Lincoln have been conserved. The Anderson cottage should serve as another unit in Washington's plan to memorialize Abraham Lincoln and here there should be assembled all available manuscripts, broadsides, and pictures which refer directly to the Emancipation Proclamation.