

# LINCOLN LORE

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## MAKING LINCOLN'S BIRTHDAY A LEGAL HOLIDAY

Twenty-seven states in the Union, one territory, Alaska, and the District of Columbia have made February 12, the birthday of Abraham Lincoln, a legal holiday and one state, Massachusetts, observes it as a holiday by proclamation of the governor. These are the states whose legislatures have set apart the day in commemoration of the 16th president of the United States:

California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Washington, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

On February 12, 1874, a petition signed by nine members of the Lincoln Memorial Club of Cincinnati and directed to the honorable Senate and House of Representatives in Congress assembled, asking that "the anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birthday be declared a legal holiday."

From the date of the petition on through the years, there have been many attempts to make the birthday of Lincoln, a national holiday, although more recently the objective has been to appeal to the individual state legislatures instead of the Federal Government.

The first successful attempt to gain recognition for the day, nationally, occurred in 1909 on which the 100th anniversary of Lincoln's birth was commemorated. As early as February 16, 1905, a resolution was submitted to Congress which looked forward to a national celebration of the centennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth. On January 31, 1908, Senator La Follette—whose grandfather once lived in Kentucky on the next farm to where President Lincoln spent his childhood—introduced a bill declaring February 12, 1909, a holiday in the District of Columbia.

On January 18, 1909, Theodore Roosevelt, President of the United States, prepared a message to Congress as follows:

"I have received from the committee of the Grand Army of the Republic, with the approval of its commander in chief, a communication running, in part, as follows:

"Pursuant to the recommendation of the committee authorized by the Forty-first National Encampment, Grand Army of the Republic, and appointed "to take into consideration the fitting celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln," which was made a report to the Forty-second National Encampment that was unanimously adopted, the undersigned having been appointed a committee to prepare a programme for the occasion, met in New York City October 19, 1908, and submits the following as the result of its deliberations:

"(1) That the commander in chief be requested to invite the President of the United States, governors of States and Territories, and mayors of cities, to participate with the Grand Army of the Republic in public recognition of the centennial anniversary of the birthday of Abraham Lincoln, February 12, 1909, and by proclamation, as far as practicable, recommend that the day be observed as a special holiday."

"I regard the proposal as eminently proper. It will be from every standpoint desirable to observe this hundredth anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln as a special holiday. I recommend that Congress pass a law authorizing me to issue a proclamation setting apart this day as a special holiday.

"Theodore Roosevelt."

It was not until February 11, 1909, that sufficient legislation was enacted to allow President Roosevelt to issue his proclamation, making the following day a legal

holiday. It would appear that the lateness of the proclamation could have had little effect in causing the day to be observed generally.

"Whereas by Joint Resolution of Congress it is provided 'That the twelfth day of February, nineteen hundred and nine, the same being the centennial anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln, be and the same is hereby, made a special legal holiday in the District of Columbia and the Territories of the United States';

"And whereas by the said Joint Resolution the President is authorized to issue a proclamation in accordance with the foregoing setting apart the twelfth day of February, nineteen hundred and nine, as a special legal holiday;

"Now, Therefore, I, Theodore Roosevelt, President of the United States of America, in virtue of the authority conferred upon me by the said Joint Resolution, do hereby set apart the twelfth day of February, nineteen hundred and nine, as a special legal holiday.

"In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

"Done at the City of Washington this eleventh day of February in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and nine, and of the Independence of the United States the one hundred and thirty-third.

"Theodore Roosevelt."

Of all the proclamations, however, which have been associated with the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln, no one of them has received quite so fine a response as the one issued by Calvin Coolidge as Governor of Massachusetts on January 30, 1919. It has been considered by many authorities, one of the finest tributes ever written to Lincoln and his mother.

"Fivescore and ten years ago that Divine Providence, which infinite repetition has made only the more a miracle, sent into the world a new life, destined to save a nation. No star, no sign, foretold his coming. About his cradle all was poor and mean save only the source of all great men, the love of a wonderful woman. When she faded away in his tender years, from her deathbed in humble poverty she dowered her son with greatness. There can be no proper observance of a birthday which forgets the mother. Into his origin, as into his life, men long have looked and wondered. In wisdom great, but in humility greater, in justice strong, but in compassion stronger, he became a leader of men by being a follower of the truth. He overcame evil with good. His presence filled the Nation. He broke the might of oppression. He restored a race to its birthright. His mortal frame has vanished, but his spirit increases with the increasing years, the richest legacy of the greatest century.

"Men show by what they worship what they are. It is no accident that before the great example of American manhood our people stand with respect and reverence. And in accordance with this sentiment our laws have provided for a formal recognition of the birthday of Abraham Lincoln; for in him is revealed our ideal, the hope of our country fulfilled.

"Now, therefore, by the authority of Massachusetts, the 12th day of February is set apart as LINCOLN DAY and its observance recommended as befits the beneficiaries of his life and admirers of his character, in places of education and worship wherever our people meet one with another.

"Given at the Executive Chamber, in Boston, this 30th day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and nineteen, and of the Independence of the United States of America the one hundred and forty-third."

"Calvin Coolidge."