

LINCOLN LORE

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SOME FAMOUS OLD BALCONIES

We usually associate old balconies with stories of romance, with whispered words and soft music. But the balconies on the public buildings a century ago were the open air rostrums from which orators often shouted harsh epithets at the crowd gathered below.

Many a Fourth of July spellbinder in olden days made the eagle screech from balconies. This type of platform had much to do with encouraging free speech, as the speaker could harangue the people at will but could not be approached except through uncertain winding stairs and locked doors. Many a speaker was invited to come down out of the balcony for something more than an affectionate greeting.

Lincoln lived in the days when every first class hotel, so called, provided speaking facilities for an outdoor auditorium, and even private homes with convenient balconies facing spacious lawns often became community assembly places. The sides of the buildings from which the balconies extended offered fine sounding boards which were of great assistance to the speaker addressing outdoor audiences.

An added advantage of the balcony which rather belies its more romantic tradition was the opportunity it offered a maximum number of people to see the speaker. It is especially true with reference to Lincoln that the people were almost as anxious to see him as they were to hear him, since his personal appearance had received much attention by the press. The balcony era in which he lived was especially suited for viewing the celebrities of the day.

A balcony was too exclusive for a democratic rostrum. The people wanted their candidate down on their level where they could shake hands with him, where there was more of a give-and-take atmosphere. So the balcony was finally abandoned, although in this day of the amplified voice it would serve its purpose much better than in the old days when an audition was limited by the physical efforts of the speaker.

Tremont House—Chicago

No prominent hotel more often entertained Abraham Lincoln during his Illinois years than the Tremont House at Chicago. This hotel was located at the corner of Wells and Randolph Streets. On Saturday night, July 10, 1858, Lincoln fired his opening gun in the campaign for the senatorship, speaking from the balcony of the Tremont House. The night before, Stephen A. Douglas had spoken from the same balcony.

Kinsey's Building—Cincinnati

Lincoln's first appearance in a great city outside Illinois was at Cincinnati, Ohio, in September 1859. He spoke from the balcony of Mr. Kinsey's house on the north side of Government Square, then known as the Fifth Street market-place. It was on a Saturday night and there was an audience of four thousand people to hear him. The out-of-doors atmosphere encouraged him to speak as it were to the Kentuckians just across the river. He said in the course of his address, "By speaking distinctly I should not wonder if some of the Kentuckians would hear me on the other side of the river." This speech from Mr. Kinsey's balcony occupied two and one-half hours.

Bates House—Indianapolis

At the close of the first day of his trip to Washington in 1861, Lincoln reached Indianapolis and addressed the

citizens from the balcony of the Bates House which stood where the Claypool Hotel now stands. This tablet marks the spot:

HERE FEB. 11, 1861/ABRAHAM LINCOLN ON/HIS WAY TO WASHINGTON TO ASSUME THE/PRESIDENCY IN AN ADDRESS SAID "I APPEAL/TO YOU TO CONSTANTLY BEAR IN MIND THAT/NOT WITH OFFICE SEEKERS BUT WITH YOU IS THE QUESTION SHALL THE/UNION AND SHALL THE LIBERTIES OF THE COUNTRY/BE PRESERVED TO THE/LATEST GENERATIONS."

Monongahela House—Pittsburgh

It was an early morning speech that Lincoln made from the balcony of the Monongahela House at Pittsburgh, and here again his outdoor rostrum gave him an opportunity to point across the Monongahela River in the direction of the South. He could not have foreseen the long struggle ahead when he said, "Let the people on both sides keep their self-possession, and just as other clouds have cleared away in due time, so will this great nation continue to prosper as heretofore."

Continental Hotel—Philadelphia

It is not known generally that Lincoln made three speeches in Philadelphia on his way to the Inaugural. The one which he delivered from the balcony of the Continental Hotel the evening he arrived on February 21 was the longest of the three. As might be expected his balcony speech was more informal, more personal, than the others. This one sentence suggests the tenor of his remarks: "I promise you that I bring to the work a sincere heart. Whether I will bring a head equal to that heart will be for future times to determine."

Caldwell House—Lancaster

The Caldwell House at Lancaster, Pennsylvania, had a famous balcony which has been memorialized with a bronze tablet. Lincoln spoke from this balcony on the way to Washington, and a few days later James Buchanan, having returned to his home from his residence in the White House, spoke from the same balcony. The tablet inscription follows:

1861-1912

ABOVE THIS SPOT, ON THE OUTER WALL OF THE CALDWELL HOUSE FORMERLY OCCUPYING THIS SITE WAS AN EXTERIOR BALCONY.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

ADDRESSED THE PEOPLE OF LANCASTER FROM THIS BALCONY FEBRUARY 22, 1861 ON THE JOURNEY FROM HIS HOME IN SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS TO WASHINGTON FOR HIS FIRST INAUGURATION.

White House—Washington

Abraham Lincoln's farewell to the nation was spoken from the balcony of the White House on the evening of April 11, 1865, in celebration of the close of the war. This was the President's last public speech and his last words indicated that the sentiment of his Inaugural address, "With malice toward none, with charity for all," was to be the spirit of the reconstruction proceedings. These were his last words spoken from the most famous balcony of them all, the portico of the White House: "Important principles may and must be inflexible. In the present situation, as the phrase goes, it may be my duty to make some new announcement to the people of the South. I am considering, and shall not fail to act when satisfied that action will be proper." The message of encouragement to the South he never lived to speak.