

LINCOLN LORE

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BODY-GUARD "TOOK"

There were many body-guards of Abraham Lincoln who served during his occupancy of the White House and there were a still larger number guarding his body after his death, but one name stands out among them, over-shadowing to some extent all of the others. This man was William H. Crook, whom "Tad" Lincoln called "Took". We find "Took" and "Tad" were often together.

It would be unjust indeed, to call attention to door-keeper Pendel, recently featured in Lincoln Lore, and not mention body-guard Crook.

For about four months, Pendel served as a member of the company of four body-guards in the White House, but on his promotion as doorkeeper, William H. Crook became his successor and served in the capacity as personal guard to the President until the assassination. Crook continued on at the White House through five administrations.

The vacancy made in the guard by Pendel's transfer caused Crook to be sent to the Executive Mansion on January 4, 1865 and his first duty at a public function was as a guard at the White House reception on the evening of January 9. Crook must have been about the only man in Washington at that time who had the courage to detain Kate Chase Sprague, when she attempted to carry her wraps with her into the reception room. For fear that some unfriendly person might hide concealed weapons, all guests at this reception were obliged to leave their wraps in the cloak room. Mrs. Sprague became quite angry, but Crook insisted that his instructions be complied with.

We are under obligation to Lincoln's body-guard for presenting a picture of him in his attitude toward his servants. While Crook was serving his apprenticeship, during the first few days in the White House, Mr. Lincoln noted that he was rather nervous and took particular pains to make him feel at ease. Crook appreciated this thoughtfulness and stated that "Lincoln's manner was due to the intuitive sympathy with everyone. . . . His sympathy was shown particularly to those who were subordinate to him. The statesman who came to consult him, those who had it in their power to influence the policy of the party who has chosen him, never had the consideration from Mr. Lincoln that he gave the humblest of those who served him."

Another interesting reminiscence Crook has left us is with respect to Lincoln's restless nights. He states that in his patrol duty in the White House when he came near the President's room after a day of unusual anxiety, that he could hear the President's deep breathing. Crook said, "I have heard him moan in his sleep. It gave me a curious sensation." He further continued, "I would stand there and listen until a sort of panic stole over me. If he felt the weight of things so heavily how much worse the situation of the country must be than any of us realized!"

One of the conclusions which Crook made is of interest when he states that during his 40 years service in the White House, there was never a time when the Executive Mansion had been "so entirely given over to the public as during Lincoln's administration."

A rather sympathetic note which Mr. Crook sounds on referring to Mrs. Lincoln is refreshing and he said that he saw a great deal of her when he was on day duty. He emphasizes the fact that few realized how exacting were the duties of her position. He furthermore commented that a set of china which Mrs. Lincoln chose for the White House was in his opinion the handsomest that had ever been used there. Lincoln's body-guard also commented upon Mrs. Lincoln's interest in charity cases that were called to her attention and concluded by saying "She was kind to all the employees of the White House. I think she was very generally liked."

It is interesting to note the names of some of the visitors whom Crook claims came quite regular to pay their compliments to the President during the last few weeks of his life. He mentions General Sheridan, Dr. Gurley, Surgeon Barnes, General Halleck, General Farnsworth, Attorney General Speed, and Marshall Lamon. Secretary Welles was also mentioned as one of the members of the cabinet most closely associated with Lincoln.

Lincoln's manner toward those who criticised him is emphasized by Crook when he says Lincoln did not grow impatient with Thad Stephens, nor make any reply to Duff Green who insulted him. Neither did he become disloyal to Chase or other high officers who felt superior to him. Crook felt that there was but one man who Lincoln thoroughly disliked and that was Charles Sumner. When a rumor got about that Lincoln did not like Sumner, Crook said Lincoln immediately invited him to escort Mrs. Lincoln to the second inaugural ball. Possibly the most significant experience in Crook's career was the accompanying of Lincoln in the last few days of his life to City Point and later to Richmond. He walked with Lincoln in that most peculiar triumphant entry that any executive ever made into a captured country. With an escort of a dozen sailors, an admiral and a captain on his right and body-guard Crook on his left holding the hand of Tad, the strange procession marched through the streets of Richmond. Later when Lincoln was shown through the city in a carriage, it was Crook who rode a horse beside the conveyance. In referring to the Richmond visit, Crook said, "Mr. Lincoln never looked sadder in his life than when walking through the streets of Richmond."

But Crook had more vivid memories than the Richmond experience, because he was with Lincoln just a few hours before he was assassinated. He tells of going to the office of the Secretary of War, of Lincoln saying something about the probability that he might be assassinated. According to Crook, Lincoln told him that he did not wish to go to the theatre that evening. Lincoln said, "It has been advertised that we will be there and I cannot disappoint the people, otherwise I would not go. I do not want to go."

Crook went off duty on April 14 about sundown and the night body-guard took his place. As Crook was leaving the White House for his little home on Rodbird's Hill, Lincoln said "Good-by Crook", and the body-guard of the President recalls that before he had always said "Good night".