

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN AT INDEPENDENCE HALL

Probably Abraham Lincoln's first view of Independence Hall was in June 1848 when he spent three days in Philadelphia while in attendance at the Whig National Convention held in the Chinese Museum. Lincoln arrived on June 7th and was there until June 10th. Taylor was nominated for President on June 9th, followed by the nomination of Fillmore for the office of vice-presidency. After these acts of the convention, the entire group of delegates retired to Independence Square where a great many speeches were made from various platforms erected for the celebration. At that time the old Liberty Bell was hanging in the belfry, but it had been cracked on Washington's birthday two years before, and probably was not used on the occasion of the Whig convention.

The inaugural trip to Washington in 1860 included one engagement to which Abraham Lincoln must have looked forward with much pleasure. He was invited to participate in a flag raising at Independence Hall on Washington's birthday. If he had not been following the policy, on this trip, of curtailing his remarks to the fewest possible words, it is likely that one of the outstanding speeches of his career might have been delivered in Philadelphia. As it is, what few words he did say at the flag raising and at two other appearances were prophetic, at least.

He arrived at Philadelphia on the evening of February 21st and was immediately escorted to the Continental Hotel where he responded to a word of welcome from the mayor of the city. Even in this response he anticipated the influence of the city's historic shrine. After referring to "the consecrated walls" wherein the Constitution of the United States and Declaration originated, he said, "All my political warfare has been in favor of the teachings that come forth from these sacred walls. May my right hand forget its cunning and my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if ever I prove false to those teachings."

On the morning of February 22nd, he stood within the Nation's shrine and made a few brief remarks. He said in part:

"I am filled with deep emotion at finding myself standing in this place, where were collected together the wisdom, the patriotism, the devotion to principle, from which sprang the institutions under which we live. . . . I have often inquired of myself what great principle or idea it was that kept this Confederacy so long together. It was not the mere matter of separation of the colonies from the motherland, but that sentiment in the Declaration of Independence which gave liberty not alone to the people of this country, but hope to all the world, for all future time. It was that which gave promise that in due time the weights would be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that all should have an equal chance. This is the sentiment embodied in the Declaration of Independence. Now, my friends, can this country be saved on that basis? If it can, I will consider myself one of the happiest men in the world if I can help to save it. If it cannot be saved upon that principle, it will be truly awful. But if this country cannot be saved without giving up that principle, I was about to say I would rather be assassinated on this spot than surrender it."

The remarks made at the flag raising which followed were even more condensed than at either of the two other occasions on which he had spoken publicly in the city, although this exercise was the primary service to which he was invited. He mentioned the new star (Kansas) which was added to the flag, and made some further comments about the growth of the Nation.

The new flag Lincoln raised over Independence Hall that day was in itself significant, as it was made of China silk. Major Henry J. Snyder, who participated in the celebration, stated: "When the check cord was pulled and the flag, a beautiful banner of China silk, was blown out by the breeze the cheers, yells and hurrahs that went up from the crowd were louder than any I ever heard. . . . It was a fine and historic banner made by sailors on board the U. S. S. Hartford, as that ship was on its way from China waters, and the flag had been intended for presentation to the port where the men were to be paid off—which happened, in this case, to be the port of Philadelphia."

Upon reaching Harrisburg that same day and speaking before the Legislature, he expressed regret that he had not more time at Philadelphia to make known his feelings, excited by his visit to Independence Hall and the occasion of the flag raising.

On July 16, 1864, a little over three years after he raised the flag over Independence Hall, he was back in the city for a visit to the Philadelphia Sanitary Fair. His reluctance to attend any more fairs was emphasized by a humorous recital of the incidents which occurred at Philadelphia. He said:

"Why, I was nearly pulled to pieces before I reached Philadelphia. The train stopped at every station on the route, and at many places where there were no stations, only people; and my hand was nearly wrung off before I reached the Fair. Then from the depot for two miles it was a solid mass of people blocking the way. Everywhere there were people shouting and cheering; and they would reach into the carriage and shake hands, and hold on, until I was afraid they would be killed, or I pulled from the carriage.

"When we reached the Fair it was worse yet. The police tried to open a way through the crowds for me, but they had to give it up; and I didn't know as I was going to get in at all. The people were everywhere; and, if they saw me starting for a place, they rushed there first, and stood shouting, hurraing, and trying to shake hands. By and by, the Committee had worried me along to a side door, which they suddenly opened, pushed me in, and then turned the key; and that gave me a chance to lunch, shake myself, and draw a long breath.

"That was the only quiet moment I had; for all the time I was in Philadelphia I was crowded, and jostled, and pulled about, and cheered, and serenaded, until I was more used up than I ever remember to have been in my life. I don't believe I could stand another Fair."

Less than nine months after the Sanitary Fair episode the body of Lincoln was being returned for burial at Springfield, and the itinerary called for a stop at Philadelphia. The city was reached at 4:30, on Saturday afternoon, April 22nd. The body was taken to Independence Hall where it lay in state in the Declaration Chamber until the following Monday morning. It is estimated that 300,000 people viewed the body during this interval. The old Liberty Bell had long since been removed from the belfry and rested close by the remains of Lincoln which led one author to observe:

"The broken bell that had 'proclaimed liberty throughout the land,' and the broken body of him who had issued the Proclamation of Emancipation, and thus proclaimed liberty 'to all inhabitants thereof' paid mute tribute one to the other. The union was preserved and slavery was abolished."