

# LINCOLN LORE

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## A SCOTCH CAP AND MILITARY COAT

Lincoln's humiliation at the time of his secret entrance into Washington previous to his inauguration in 1861 was greatly intensified by a wholly untrue and apparently malicious story about his having arrived in the Capitol wearing "a Scotch cap and military cloak." The tremendous publicity given to this ridiculous fabrication with reference to his apparel gave the contemporary cartoonists an opportunity to heap ridicule upon the President-elect.

The New York Times had assigned Joseph Howard, Jr., to the task of gathering news about the Lincoln family as they journeyed from Springfield, Illinois, to Washington. This was the same Joseph Howard who later on composed the fake proclamation of May 18, 1864, and forged Lincoln's name to it. For this piece of questionable political strategy Howard was thrown in jail. After several weeks of confinement he was released by an order of Lincoln.

An obscure newspaper clipping which was copied from the Philadelphia Press by the Burlington, Vermont, Free Press for November 21, 1884, gives Howard's own account of the bogus story. Although written twenty-three years after the 1861 episode occurred, a previous confinement in his room by a detective on the evening of the affair had not been forgotten. Here Howard admits that, with reference to the cap and cloak story: "There isn't a word of truth in it." Howard's statement of what took place follows:

(Joe Howard in Philadelphia Press)

"I had been delegated by the paper I represented to accompany Mr. Lincoln and his family from Springfield, Ill., to Washington, and, of course, I did so. I stood within a yard of him, when, in Trenton, he made the memorable assertion that it was time the government put its foot down firmly, and I was with him in Philadelphia when he was comfortably housed in the Continental hotel, where the best people in the city vied with each other to do him honor and pay him the respect so honestly his due. And, by the way, this is about as good a time as any for me to explain the Scotch cap and military cloak story, which long since passed into history, and can be found in all the cyclopedias of the day.

"There isn't a word of truth in it. The intention was, after the reception and parade in Philadelphia, Mr. Lincoln and his party reviewing the torchlight wide-awakes and bands of music, and attended by thousands, from his rooms on Chestnut street, to go by the early train to Harrisburg, where, as in big places, a reception was to be given and a procession had in his honor, and thence direct to Washington. This plan, however was thwarted by information brought to the Continental, and communicated, I think, first to Mr. Kingsley and subsequently intrusted to Mr. Lincoln, although the wisdom of that step was then and has ever since been doubted. The information was to the effect that the train from Harrisburg was to be thrown from the track in the hope of killing the president-elect, without regard to the lives or safety of his wife and children and a large number of notables who were accompanying them. Mrs. Kingsley and Lincoln and gentlemen in charge of the party, who were Col. Wood, subsequently superintendent of buildings in Washington; Ward Lamon, subsequently marshal

of the District of Columbia, and a detective in the secret service by the name of Burns, brother of the Burns who used to keep the Pierrepont house in Brooklyn, kept the secret well. It was an anxious night with those people and with Mr. Seward, Jr., who accompanied the detective from Washington and brought the information to the parties interested. The next morning the presidential group started, and a continuous ovation greeted them all the way to Harrisburg, where a very creditable turnout was made with speech, band and fireworks accompaniment. I went to my room in the hotel at night, and was preparing my dispatch to wire to this city when Detective Burns entered the room and locked the door.

"I looked at him in amazement, and asked him what he meant. He told me I couldn't leave the room until the following morning. I asked why, and to make a long story short, in spite of my threats and representations of serious embarrassment to me personally and professionally, the conclusion was that I was not to leave until the following morning, as it was for the public good, which he, upon my promise not to use, explained, saying that Mr. Lincoln had already left by a special engine and car, and had gone back over his track in time to catch the evening train from New York, while his family and the rest of the party would continue their journey in accordance with the prearranged programme. He also informed me that the wires had been cut, and that communication with New York was a physical impossibility, but that nevertheless his orders were that none of the newspaper men should leave their rooms that night. I at once wrote a dispatch beginning as follows: 'Abraham Lincoln, president-elect of the United States, is safe in the city of Washington,' and then proceeded to narrate the circumstances, as unfolded to me by the detective who, with considerable mystery, said that no one would recognize Mr. Lincoln at sight, and that the plans of the conspirators were fortunately foiled.

"I asked myself what possible disguise would Lincoln get in Harrisburg, and, as I wrote on, I imagined him in a Scotch cap, which would be about as marked and opposite to his high silk hat as one could conceive, and a military cloak, which I borrowed, in my imagination, from the shapely shoulders of Col. Sumner, who was traveling with the president-elect. My dispatch was sent very early in the morning, and, by good luck, reached The Times office just as the day editor entered his room. His first thought was: 'Well, this is a pretty time of day for Howard's dispatch to arrive,' and, taking it up, mechanically glanced at it. The first sentence attracted his attention. Hurriedly reading it, and seeing its importance, he ordered it put up and an extra gotten out at once. The first thing known in this city by our esteemed contemporaries in especial and the public in general was when 1000 newsboys electrified the town with the extra Times and its astounding revelation of the diabolical plot against the chosen head of the nation. Immediately the illustrated papers took the matter up, and one and all printed pictures of Mr. Lincoln fleeing from Harrisburg, arranged in this chimerical garb, a Scotch cap and long military cloak. The story was absolutely correct, the trimmings were pure imagination."