

# LINCOLN LORE

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## LAST HOURS AT SPRINGFIELD

The heartfelt words of farewell which Abraham Lincoln spoke to his neighbors upon his departure for the inauguration at the nation's capitol have overshadowed all other incidents which occurred during the few last hours at Springfield. Even the significance of the season as well as the change in arrangements for the trip have been given little attention although directly bearing upon the two extremities of one's life.

Lincoln was so free from any sort of affectation that probably it never occurred to him that he was leaving Springfield on the day before his fifty-second birthday. If he had been at all publicity minded he would have seen the value of departure for the journey on the anniversary day of his nativity and so arranged it. When he reached the Indiana state line it would seem he would have mentioned the birth date as he said to the committee from Indiana which greeted him, "I am happy to meet you on this occasion and enter again the state of my early life almost of my nativity." Yet with this lead he made no mention that his natal day occurred on the morrow. There was no birthday cake for him either at Indianapolis or at Cincinnati on February 12, 1861, and although he spoke at the latter city just across the river from the state where he was born no mention is made that he was addressing them on the anniversary of his birth. It is not now recalled that Lincoln ever paid any attention to his birthday.

Regardless of Lincoln's failure to popularize the anniversary day of his birth Lincoln students will always recall, each year, that he started for the capitol the day before his own birthday and arrived at his destination the day after George Washington's birthday. He never forgot the birthday of the father of his country. As early as February 22, 1842, he gave a famous address at Springfield which concluded with these words:

"This is the one hundred and tenth anniversary of the birthday of Washington; we are met to celebrate this day. Washington is the mightiest name of earth—long since mightiest in the cause of civil liberty, still mightiest in moral reformation. On that name no eulogy is expected. It cannot be. To add brightness to the sun or glory to the name of Washington is alike impossible. Let none attempt it. In solemn awe pronounce the name, and in its naked deathless splendor leave it shining on."

Just twenty years later through his own proclamation as President of the United States, February 22nd was set apart to "celebrate the anniversary of the birth of the Father of his country."

The departure of Lincoln to assume the Presidency was charged with a depressing atmosphere far removed from nativity sentiments and it even finds expression in the farewell address in the words, "not knowing when or whether ever I may return."

As early as January 30th the Illinois State Journal came out with the statement, "There are numerous and contradictory reports in the public journals in reference to the time when Mr. Lincoln will take his departure

for Washington City. He is now making arrangements to leave on the 11th of February and will be accompanied by Mrs. Lincoln and his family."

However it was stated at a later date that "Mr. Lincoln's family do not accompany him at present except his oldest son Robert an undergraduate at Harvard College. Mrs. Lincoln and the two younger sons will join the party at New York thus avoiding the fatigue of the longer and less direct route laid down in the program. Mrs. Lincoln goes to St. Louis to remain a day or two."

The Chicago Tribune for February 7th came out with the statement:

"The President's Party will number fifteen of these none will be ladies. Mrs. Lincoln choosing to avoid the fatigue of such a journey. The train will leave Springfield at 8:30 A. M. Monday the 11th instant."

A dispatch issued on the twelfth of February states, "It had been decided since Saturday (February 9th) that Mrs. Lincoln and the family should accompany Mr. Lincoln throughout the entire trip, but it was necessary in the lateness of the changing of plans that she should join him at Indianapolis on Tuesday morning." Another news item from Indianapolis states, "Mrs. Lincoln and the two youngest sons joined the party; the President Elect, for the rest of the route to Washington to be accompanied by the entire family."

No explanation was offered in the press for this change of arrangements with the result that Mrs. Lincoln was held responsible for the interrupted plans. This gave rise to some stories put in circulation by those unfriendly to the Lincolns about an unladylike demonstration put on by the President's wife which was alleged to be responsible for the last moment decision to accompany the President.

The reason for the change in plans is made clear in a letter which Mrs. James C. Conkling wrote to her son on February 12th in which she states, "Mrs. Lincoln was not to leave for some days after his (Mr. Lincoln's) departure, but a dispatch from Gen. Scott determined her to leave the evening of the same day. The General thought it would be safer for him to be surrounded by his family." Mr. Conkling also wrote his son on the same day and commented: "Mrs. Lincoln left here last evening to overtake him at Indianapolis at the suggestion of General Scott."

There was great anxiety expressed for the safe conduct of Mr. Lincoln to Washington. By the time the President Elect was ready to leave the plans for departure of the family underwent considerable change. General Scott at Washington had become greatly disturbed over the rumors and apparent plots to prevent Lincoln's inauguration and he felt due precaution should be taken at the very beginning of the journey and Mrs. Lincoln is brought into the picture as one of the safeguards.