

LINCOLN LORE

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APRIL COINCIDENCES

Abraham Lincoln was time conscious and particularly cognizant of the special days in the calendar which commemorated some significant event. In his speech at Washington on the evening of July 7, 1863 he had occasion to mention the glorious Fourth of July just past. He commented, "The Fourth of July has had several very peculiar recognitions" and then took occasion to review some of them. He mentioned the fact that both Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, who contributed most to the origin and support of the Declaration of Independence, both died on the same day of the month it was signed, just exactly fifty years after the signing. He thought this was a strange coincidence and was greatly impressed by it.

This discussion, however, is confined to incidents occurring in the month of April and presents certain factors which called Lincoln's special attention to the calendar and indicates his awareness of anniversaries. One of the most amusing incidents happened during the last of the month after he had given an interview to a meteorologist, Francis L. Capen, who felt he could announce with some certainty the days on which April showers might be expected. The President had shown some interest in the project because of weather conditions bearing on troop movements. He had been advised by Capen that there would be no rain until April 30 or May 1. On April 28 the meteorologist was seeking another interview but was dismissed with this observation by the President: "It seems to me Mr. Capen knows nothing about the weather in advance. . . . It is raining now and has been for ten hours, I cannot spare any more time for Mr. Capen."

April 1

No letter Lincoln ever wrote has been so severely criticized as one written on April 1, 1835 to Mrs. O. H. Browning. It can only be pardoned by the April fool's day atmosphere in which it was written and the certainty that Lincoln felt what he wrote would never be published. It was a sort of a comic valentine he drew for himself. The young lady he took occasion to caricature is not even named and lived in the far off state of Kentucky so he had no reason to suspect the object of his ridicule would ever be identified. He never surmised there would be called to her attention the contents of the letter. The humorous epistle was brought to a timely conclusion in these words which were seasonable at least: "Others have been made fools of by the girls but this can never with truth be said of me. I most emphatically in this instance made a fool of myself."

April 4

The last child of Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln was born on April 4, 1853, just one hundred years ago day after tomorrow. This son was named Thomas Lincoln (no middle name) for his paternal grandfather who had passed away near Charleston, Illinois two years before the child's birth. The name Thomas was a favorite one among the Lincolns. In the town of Hingham, Massachusetts where the Lincoln clan first settled in America in 1637 there were as many as four Lincolns at that time bearing the given name Thomas. They were designated as Thomas the Cooper, Thomas the Husbandman, Thomas the Miller and Thomas the Weaver, a brother of the President's first American progenitor, Samuel Lincoln.

After the President was assassinated Mary Todd Lincoln wrote a letter to her late husband's stepmother, Sarah Bush Lincoln in which she commented, "Perhaps you know that our youngest boy, is named for your husband, Thomas Lincoln, this child the idol of his father. . . ." Thomas the son of the President was not often called by his given name but as an infant was lovingly nicknamed Tadpole, which was later changed to Taddie and then abbreviated by his father to just plain Tad.

On Tad's twelfth birthday April 4, 1865 he participated in one of the strangest spectacles known to history. Usually a victorious commander-in-chief entered the capital city of its vanquished foe with a great exhibition of military power and a display of enemy captives and trophies of war. When Abraham Lincoln entered the captured city of Richmond as one observer wrote: "The President manifested no signs of exultation" and "his countenance was one of indescribable sadness."

Tad was with his father and they had come to Rocket's Landing on the James River in a barge accompanied by Admiral Porter, four other officers and twelve sailors, making eighteen men and a boy in this most unusual triumphant entry to an enemy's former stronghold, ever recorded in history. Holding the hand of his twelve year old son the commander-in-chief walked a mile and a half to the military headquarters of General Weitzel where his first recorded remark was, "I wonder if I could get a drink of water?" Of course Tad shared in this refreshment, a queer atmosphere for a birthday party. Lincoln must have often been reminded during the hours in Richmond that this was the anniversary of his youngest son's birth.

April 14

With the close of the war and the Union troops occupying Charleston, South Carolina it was thought that some ceremony should be arranged for raising the flag again on Fort Sumpter. It was on April 14, 1861 that Sumpter fell to the insurgent forces and now on the fourth anniversary of the event Old Glory is again to be raised over the fortification.

The war department issued General Order No. 50 which specified that at noon on April 14, 1865: "Brevet Major-General Anderson will raise and plant upon the ruins of Fort Sumpter, in Charleston Harbor, the same United States flag which floated over the battlements of that fort during the rebel assault." It was also ordered that a salute of 100 guns be fired and Rev. Henry Ward Beecher was selected to deliver a public address. Mr. Lincoln thought that possibly the celebration should be held on the thirteenth but apparently the final terms of the fort's surrender were arranged on the 14th.

Of course we need not comment that it was on the very evening of the Fort Sumpter celebration that Lincoln was assassinated at Ford's Theatre and those who had participated in the Sumpter program did not learn of the President's assassination until nearing Washington.

April 15

The following day, April 15, 1865, on which the President passed away, also presents a strange coincidence although of course he was not able to observe it. In an auto-biographical sketch which he had prepared for John Locke Scripps in 1860 Lincoln wrote: "On April 15, 1837 removed to Springfield and commenced the practice (of law)." It might be said that his public life both began and closed on the fifteenth day of April.