

LINCOLN LORE

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THE COMANCHE CHIEFS VISIT LINCOLN

A series of coincidences relating to time element, similarity of names and illustrative Lincolniana is largely responsible for this monograph. There came in the editor's mail on almost the same day, a detailed report of the tornado which had devastated the community where he grew up in Massachusetts, and an 1876 copy of *St. Nicholas* giving an account of a visit the Comanche Indian chiefs paid to Abraham Lincoln at the White House. The name Comanche was immediately associated with the great tornado bearing that name which swept through the Iowa and Illinois country nearly a hundred years ago and left in the wake a casualty list as large as the Michigan and Massachusetts tragedies.

Thinking of the Comanche tornado recalled a reminiscence of Hesler, the Chicago photographer who went to Springfield, Ill. to make some pictures of Abraham Lincoln, then a recently nominated candidate for the Presidency. Hesler told Herbert Wells Fay that he remembered distinctly the date the photographs were taken, June 3, 1860, because it was on the day of the great Comanche tornado. Recalling the Hesler photographs there immediately came to mind a rare engraving in the Foundation collection created by Fred Dellanoy, published in Paris and bearing the title "Lincoln Recevant Les Indiens Comanches." The hand colored picture presents Lincoln addressing a group of Indian chiefs, some of them, if not all, Comanches and in their full regalia. The fact that the incident was significant enough, from the French viewpoint, to have it memorialized by a print, implies some special interest which the French had in this tribe. The Comanches were first discovered by the French in Colorado and in 1724 at which time they made a treaty with them. Later, the Indians sifted down into Texas where a reservation was set apart for them in 1847. Later on we find them in Oklahoma. The maximum population of the tribe was about 25,000 but by the time of the establishing of the Texas reservation it had dwindled to 10,000.

With the visit of the Indian chiefs strikingly visualized by the engraving before us, we return to the *St. Nicholas* article which presents the reminiscences of Albert Rhodes, a contemporary diplomat and writer who was present when Lincoln received the red skins and recorded the remarks of Lincoln upon addressing the tribesmen. Rhodes recalled that there were about 20 Indians in the delegation and their interpreter had them seated in the form of a crescent on the floor of the spacious east room. The fact that they were dressed in the full regalia of the Indian chiefs made a colorful occasion. A number of prominent people had been invited to witness the interview with the President.

Upon Lincoln's arrival in the room the chiefs were personally presented to the President who shook hands with each one. The preliminary ceremonies over, the addresses of the Indians began under somewhat embarrassing circumstances as the first chief forgot his speech. The interpreter said to the President: "White Bear asks for time to collect his thoughts," and finally he was able to proceed with his address.

Their speeches all sounded the same note of loyalty to the country but stressed the fact that their people were needy and required assistance. Big Wolf particularly

emphasized the great desire they entertained to be "prosperous and rich like their white brothers." He also stated that they wanted horses and carriages and a fine wigwam "like this", he added, as he pointed to the elegant furnishings of the East Room. He also wished they might have sausages like they ate at the Washington hotel which brought a broad smile from the President. It is understood that Big Wolf became a casualty on account of too much sausage. The real orator of the delegation was Red Fox and to convince his people he had actually seen the Great Father he wanted to return laden down with presents—"shining all over like a looking glass."

After the Indians were through the interpreter said, "Mr. President, the chiefs would be glad to have you talk." Lincoln opened his remarks with these words:

"My red brethren are anxious to be prosperous and have horses and carriages like the pale faces. I propose to tell them how they may get them." Lincoln then went on to suggest the necessary steps to satisfy their desires. He said:

"The plan is a simple one. You all have land. We will furnish you with agricultural implements, with which you will turn up the soil, by hand if you have not the means to buy an ox, but I think with the aid which you receive from the Government, you might at least purchase one ox to do the plowing for several. You will plant corn, wheat, and potatoes, and with the money for which you will sell these you will be able to each buy an ox for himself at the end of the first year. At the end of the second year, you will each be able to buy perhaps two oxen and some sheep and pigs. At the end of the third, you will probably be in a condition to buy a horse, and in the course of a few years you will thus be the possessor of horses and carriages like ourselves.

"I do not know any other way to get these things. It is the plan we have pursued—at least those of us who have them. You cannot pick them off the trees, and they do not fall from the clouds."

This part of Lincoln's speech is but the restating of his capitalistic philosophy and it almost parallels in essence a paragraph in his annual message to Congress on Dec. 3, 1861 in which he states:

"Many independent men everywhere in these States, a few years back in their lives, were hired laborers. The prudent, penniless beginner in the world, labors for wages awhile, saves a surplus with which to buy tools or land for himself; then labors on his own account another while, and at length hires another new beginner to help him. This is the just, and generous, and prosperous system, which opens the way to all—gives hope to all, and consequent energy, and progress, and improvement of condition to all."

Some statements which the President used in conclusion with respect to the extent of the world in which we live and transportation facilities which were enjoyed, are too fragmentary to present. It is to be regretted that more of the Indians did not follow the advice of Lincoln as the rich oil deposits of their country would have allowed them to have all the fine things they desired, even wigwams that rivaled the east room of the White House and plenty of sausage.

See 1066