

LINCOLN LORE

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EISENHOWER VISITS THE KENTUCKY LINCOLN COUNTRY

Once upon a time there was born of humble parents in a Kentucky cabin a poor boy who eventually came to occupy the executive mansion in the nation's capital. We now observe the trail from "log cabin to White House" being followed in reverse as in recent years five Presidents have come from the White House to the log cabin. The last chief executive to make the pilgrimage was President Eisenhower who set apart Friday, April 23, 1954 as a day to visit the Kentucky Lincoln country.

Arriving at Fort Knox by plane at 10:10 A.M. he reviewed the Amoured Force Troops, but it was not likely that he was advised that close by the Fort Knox vault where the nation's gold is deposited there lies buried the remains of Bersheba Lincoln, maternal grandmother of the Sixteenth President. Even at the fort, Eisenhower actually was already in the Kentucky Lincoln country. Traveling by auto the twenty-five miles to Hodgenville he passed through Elizabethtown where Lincoln's parents first settled after their marriage and where their first child was born. Also at Elizabethtown the widow Sarah Bush Johnston married the widower Thomas Lincoln, father of Abraham.

Reaching the Lincoln Birthplace Farm, and after observing the enshrined cabin, the President addressed an estimated audience of 4500 people. We are happy to be able to print his address in full in this issue of the bulletin. Returning to Hodgenville, President Eisenhower placed a wreath at the base of the Lincoln statue in the court house square and then was served luncheon by the Ladies Lincoln League. The editor of *Lincoln Lore* was pleased to be invited to an especially reserved area at the birthplace and also to receive an invitation to the Eisenhower luncheon. On that same day at Lexington the editor sat in the reserved section in front of the speaker's stand.

The President arrived in the blue grass city by plane and addressed the 175 anniversary convocation of Transylvania College, the oldest institution of higher learning west of the Allegheny Mountains. The forebears of Mary Todd, wife of President Lincoln were instrumental in establishing the college and Mary's father was a graduate of the Lexington school. Henry Clay, Lincoln's "beau ideal of a statesman" was a professor of law there. President Eisenhower attended the reception in the newly dedicated Francis Carrick Thomas Library erected on the campus and may have observed some of the rare volumes which were at one time stored in the home of Levi Todd, grandfather of Mary Todd Lincoln when the college was without room to house them. Abraham Lincoln visited Lexington on occasions so when President Eisenhower departed from Lexington, as upon his arrival at Fort Knox, he was still in the Kentucky Lincoln country.

President Eisenhower's speech at the Lincoln Shrine near Hodgenville, April 23, 1954.

"Senator Cooper, my fellow citizens:

"Long have I looked forward to an opportunity to visit this shrine, which is so truly American. Now, never in my wildest moment, did I picture in my mind this kind of occasion. I saw myself driving up in an ordinary jalopy, and stopping with my family to look and visit this great spot.

"I am truly honored by the courtesy you show me in being here today that I may greet you and bring a word of welcome from your far-off capital, Washington.

"I think I could best express my feelings about Lincoln in this way. In my office in the White House I

have sketches of four great Americans on the wall—Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Robert E. Lee.

"Abraham Lincoln has always seemed to me to represent all that is best in America in terms of its opportunity and the readiness of Americans always to raise up and exalt these people who live by truth, whose lives are examples of integrity and dedication to our country.

"I would like to speak about two or three characteristics of Lincoln that I think most of us could now remind ourselves, possibly with profit. He was a great leader. I would like to remind you of the methods he used in leadership.

"You can find no instances when he stood up in public and excoriated another American. You can find no instance where he reported to have slapped or pounded the table, and struck the pose of a pseudodictator, or an arbitrary individual.

"Rather, the qualities he shared and exhibited were forbearance in the extreme—patience. Once, he called upon General McClellan, and the President went over to the General's house—a process which I assure you had been reversed long since—and General McClellan decided he did not want to see the President and went to bed.

"Lincoln's friends criticized him severely for allowing a mere general to treat him that way. And he said, 'All I want out of General McClellan is a victory and if to hold his horse will bring it, I will gladly hold his horse.'

"This means one thing: Lincoln's leadership was accomplished through dedication to a single purpose, the preservation of the Union. He understood deeply the great values that unite us all as a people, Georgia with New York and Massachusetts with Texas, California with Florida. He knew that there were divisive influences at work, but he knew also they were transitory in character; they were flaming with heat, but they were made of stuff that would soon burn itself out.

"The true values of America he understood are enduring, and they hold us together. And so he was patient. He was forbearing. He was understanding. And he lives today in our hearts as one of the greatest that the English-speaking race has produced, and as a great leader. Yet never did he fall into the false habit of striking a Napoleonic attitude at any time and under any provocation.

"We remember his words because they still mean for us and still explain to us what this country is:

"The greatest power in God's footstool that has been permitted to exist. A power for good, among ourselves, and in all the world.

"And he—this great Lincoln—was the one who did so much to give us the opportunity to live at a time when that would be so—when America's leadership in the world is necessary to the preservation of freedom and of liberty in that world, just as his presence in the 1860's was necessary to the preservation of liberty and freedom and union of this nation.

"Thank you again for the great honor you do me for coming out here. I cannot tell you how happy I am, at least, to have the opportunity of coming to the birthplace of Lincoln, a man who for me—like all of you—has been an idol since the days of my first memories.

"Thank you and good-bye."