

LINCOLN LORE

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TWO WEEKS AT WILLARDS

Very little attention has been paid to the important episodes which occurred during the two weeks which the Lincoln family lived in the Willard Hotel in Washington preliminary to their occupancy of the White House. The limited space available here will do little more than present the change in plans which finally domiciled them in the famous hostelry.

As early as February 13, 1861, it was announced in a dispatch from a *New York Herald* representative at Cincinnati that "Mr. Lincoln will arrive in Washington on Saturday of next week, and will stop at a private house." These plans seem to support the general assumption that his Illinois friends, Trumbull and Washburn, then at Washington would look after the providing of a place for the family to reside. It was reported that they had already rented a place on 13th or 14th street for the President-elect's temporary abode.

When Lincoln reached Albany, the home of Thurlow Weed, some change in these plans was proposed. The dispatch from that city on February 18 presents what on the face of it appears to be merely a casual notice. It states that after the speech of the President at the capitol "Thurlow Weed accompanied Abraham Lincoln to his room" at the Delevan Hotel.

It seems to be very well confirmed that Mr. Weed was anxious to get Lincoln out from under the influence of the Illinois politicians and make him more accessible to all the people of the nation.

On the following day therefore, Mr. Weed sent this letter to the proprietor of the Washington hotel:

"Albany, Feb. 19, 1861

Dear Willard,—Mr. Lincoln will be your guest. In arranging his apartments, please reserve nearest him apartments for two of his friends, Judge Davis and Mr. Lamont.

Truly yours,
(Signed) Thurlow Weed."

Just how much Mr. Lamont had to do with the change of arrangements is problematical but he does claim in his reminiscences that he received this reaction from Mr. Lincoln upon learning of the change to Willard's:

"I fear it will give mortal offense to our friends, but I think the arrangement a good one. I can readily see that many other well meant plans will 'gang alee,' but I am sorry. The truth is, I suppose I am now public property; and a public inn is the place where people can have access to me."

Apparently the press at Washington was not immediately advised about the change in plans as the Washington correspondent of the *New York Herald* sends this notice to his paper.

MR. LINCOLN'S QUARTERS IN WASHINGTON.

Washington, Feb. 19, 1861.

The statement made in a New York paper, that Mr. Lincoln will stop at a hotel upon his arrival here, is not true. Mr. Seward, who invited Mr. Lincoln to become his

guest, has decided not to hire Gen. Cass' house, and may not have his new residence in condition to receive the President-elect. In that event Mr. Lincoln, under the direction of his friends, who have charge of his temporary household arrangements here, have decided that he will take private quarters, if a convenient place can be procured, otherwise the Presidential party will stop at Willard's.

A dispatch on the following day by the same Washington correspondent to the *Herald* indicates a reluctance to accept the Willard story, but clings to the private residence proposal in these words:

ARRANGEMENTS FOR MR. LINCOLN IN WASHINGTON

Washington, Feb. 20, 1861.

The business of arranging the preliminaries for the reception for Mr. Lincoln was left some time since to the charge of the Illinois delegation in Congress, and they have completed the arrangements, as indicated in my despatch yesterday, by procuring private apartments, having engaged an elegant and commodious dwelling in Franklin row, belonging to Mrs. Commodore Smoot. The South Carolina Commissioners occupied the same house. It is being thoroughly refurnished. Mr. Smith, of the Congressional Conservatory, is already busy in decorating and perfuming it with the natural productions of his choice floral collection

Mr. Lincoln's suite will stop at Willard's.

The selection of a private house for Mr. Lincoln, instead of subjecting him to the mob of a hotel, is considered wise by all of his friends here.

It was just at this time that Harriet Lane, niece of President Buchanan, and mistress of the White House invited Mrs. Lincoln "to come directly to the White House upon her arrival here" and according to the press correspondent this thoughtfulness "will never be forgotten by the recipient of the courtesy."

The papers of February 22 announce the arrival of President Lincoln at six A. M. and state he was: "Received at the depot by Mr. Seward and Senator Washburn of Illinois and proceeded very quietly to Willard's."

An announcement the following day stated: "Mr. Lincoln's family accompanied by his suite will reach here this afternoon. A suite of five elegantly furnished rooms in the southwest corner of Willard's, fronting on Pennsylvania Ave. and overlooking the White House, have been set apart for President Lincoln and his family."

Helen Nicolay in her recent book entitled *Lincoln's Secretary* makes available the contents of a fragment of a letter written by her father "back home" after the arrival at Washington. He states: "For the present we are quartered at Willard's Hotel. The original program was to go to a private house which had been rented for the purpose. This plan having been changed, and no rooms having been reserved, all the party except Mr. Lincoln have but sorry accommodations."