

LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Number 1260

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

June 1, 1953

THE JUNE 1ST FAST DAY OF 1865

The last official observance in the long series of ceremonies associated with Abraham Lincoln's death, occurred on June 1, 1865, set apart by the President of the United States as a National Fast Day. From the announcement of the martyr's demise on April 15 until the close of the fast day services, a period of six weeks, there was a succession of memorial assemblies. No American in history has been so deeply mourned over such a long period of time.

The rites over the departed might be said to have started at the very moment of his death at 7:22 a.m. when Stanton remarked upon the doctor's announcement that the President had taken his last breath: "Now he belongs to the ages." Dr. P. D. Gurley minister of the church Lincoln attended then offered prayer.

When the news of the President's tragic departure reached the people on that fateful Saturday the church bells began to toll and continued until sunset. By afternoon there were many public meetings in session. Typical of the assemblies was one reported at Groton Junction, Massachusetts, where the people convened "to notice in appropriate manner the President's death."

Although little time was available for the ministers of the churches to prepare sermons of grief to replace the Easter messages of joy, wherever the sad news had been received there was an attempt to create for the services the atmosphere of mourning. April 16, 1865 became known as Black Easter. By Sunday afternoon dispatches began to reach the military, the government order called for the flags at half mast, and crape upon the left arm of the uniform. The draping of the buildings in mourning were mute tokens of the tragedy.

On Monday however, the news was thundered across the nation by reason of an order issued at Washington the day before: "At dawn of day thirteen guns will be fired, and afterward, at intervals of thirty minutes, between the rising and the setting of the sun, a single gun, and at the close of the day a national salute of 36 guns." By Monday night the people were conscious that a great calamity had occurred in the passing of Abraham Lincoln.

Acting Secretary of State Hunter at Washington on Monday the seventeenth announced that "the funeral ceremonies of the lamented chief magistrate will take place at the Executive Mansion in this city, at 12 o'clock noon, Wednesday the nineteenth instant." His dispatch also included this recommendation, "The various religious denominations throughout the country are invited to meet in their respective places of worship at the time for the purpose of solemnizing the occasion by appropriate ceremonies." This last request was far reaching and while many clergymen had already centered their thoughts about the lamented Lincoln on the Sunday following his assassination, they responded universally to this official appeal.

An authority on Lincolniana has compiled a list of 404 pamphlets which contain sermons on Abraham Lincoln. Of course there is no way to estimate the great number of discourses which appeared in newspapers and the still larger number which were actually delivered but not recorded. The general impression is that most of the published sermons were preached on the Sunday following the assassination but less than one-seventh of the number tabulated originated on that day. It was on

April 19 that the greater proportion of those to appear in pamphlet form were delivered, comprising over one-fourth of the whole number. There were about as many memorial sermons preached on the second Sunday after Lincoln's death as on the first Sunday.

We can merely mention the funeral cortege which left Washington on Friday morning, April 21 and passing through the most populated part of the country made it possible for countless thousands of people to view the remains of the President and hear eulogies paying tribute to him. For two weeks this grand procession moved among the people widely reported by the press and traveling 1600 miles. The final words were spoken at Springfield, Illinois by Dr. P. D. Gurley who had made the brief prayer at the moment the President expired and had also preached the funeral sermon at Washington.

Apparently while the funeral train was in progress the idea originated in Congress of having a day of final tribute "so that all shall be occupied at the same time" in paying respects to the fallen chief. On April 23 the President issued the following proclamation.

"Whereas, our country has become one great house of mourning, where the head of the family has been taken away; and believing that a special period should be assigned for again humbling ourselves before Almighty God, in order that the bereavement may be sanctified to the nation; now, therefore, in order to mitigate that grief on earth which can only be assuaged by communion with the Father in Heaven, and in compliance with the wishes of Senators and Representatives in Congress communicated to me by a resolution adopted at the National Capital, I Andrew Johnson, President of the United States, do hereby appoint Thursday, the 25th day of May, next, to be observed wherever in the United States the flag of the country may be respected, as a day of humiliation and mourning, and I recommend my fellow citizens then to assemble in their respective places of worship, there to unite in solemn service to Almighty God in memory of the good man who has been removed, so that all shall be occupied at the same time in the contemplation of his virtues, and sorrow for his sudden and violent end."

After issuing the proclamation it was called to the attention of the President that the day set apart fell on Ascension Day, a period of rejoicing in the Christian calendar. This caused the President, by a subsequent proclamation, to change the date to June 1. It will be noted that the memorial day set apart by Johnson's revised proclamation occurred six weeks after the Lincoln funeral services were held at the White House and a whole month had passed since his body was laid to rest in the burial vault at Oak Ridge Cemetery near Springfield, Illinois.

One important factor produced by these June 1st fast day ceremonies was the further accentuation of public sentiment against those southern leaders erroneously supposed to have been responsible for the assassination of Lincoln. The widely observed ceremonies renewed the intense feeling in the north that was to some extent on the wane, and encouraged irresponsible politicians to promote a ruthless program for the reconstruction days.

See 109, 164, 477, 895