

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN'S VISIT TO PHILADELPHIA IN JUNE 1864

The Sanitary Fairs of the Civil War period were the local agencies which raised funds for administering to the needs of the soldiers—the Red Cross organizations of that day. Naturally the presence of the Chief Executive was solicited at these functions. On May 23, 1864 John Welsh, chairman of the Executive Committee of the Great Central Fair to be held in Philadelphia extended to Mr. Lincoln the following invitation to attend:

"My dear sir: The opening ceremonies of the Great Central Fair in aid of United States Sanitary Commission will occur on the afternoon of the seventh of June, and as the object of the fair is to provide for the relief of those who suffer in the great conflict in which our nation is engaged, the executive committee look to you our chief magistrate as the one to dedicate our spontaneous offerings, many of them the fruits of self-denial and all of them of deep sympathy for the suffering—to the holy purpose for which they are given.

"Should any cause prevent a compliance with our wish which we shall much deplore, we beg that you will appoint some one to represent you on the occasion."

On May 28 Mr. Lincoln received the following telegram from Hon. C. A. Welborn of Philadelphia stating that Mr. Welsh "has requested me to ask if you have received his letter in relation to attending the fair—an immediate answer will oblige the committee." The following day the President sent this note to Mr. Welborn:

"Yours received. I have felt constrained to answer repeated invitations to attend the great fair at your city, that I cannot be present at its opening, and that whether I can during its continuance must depend upon circumstances."

With this rather indefinite reaction before them the Philadelphians really got busy and a committee composed of Thomas Webster, N. B. Brown, W. H. Ashurst and James A. Stevens was appointed to wait on the President at Washington and urge his and Mrs. Lincoln's attendance. The invitation was accepted and the initial plans called for departure on Wednesday afternoon, June 15 but pressure of official business caused the trip to be postponed until the following day. At seven a.m. Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln with their youngest son, Tad, Judge Campbell of California, Cuthbert Bullitt of New Orleans, the fair committee which had extended the invitation, and a news correspondent, J. R. Macartney of the *Daily Morning Chronicle* left for Philadelphia by a special train of two cars.

Large crowds assembled at the railroad stations enroute to get a glimpse of the President. At Relay House a salute of thirty-four guns was fired. At Baltimore, the party was joined by Gen. Lewis Wallace and Col. Bowman of Maryland. A gaily decorated engine called the "Massachusetts" pulled the train from here on and at Havre-de-Grace the 149th Ohio Regiment fired a salute. The presidential group was increased at Wilmington, by Governor Cannon of Delaware, Col. Wilmer, Provost Marshall, Rev. J. S. Dickerson and John P. McLearn, Esq.

While the train was standing at Wilmington, Lincoln observed a "hard fisted mechanic" looking through a window and the President said he wanted "to shake hands with such an honest looking blacksmith." The train arrived in Philadelphia at 11:25 a.m., the 140 miles having been covered in four hours and twenty-five minutes.

A procession was formed at the depot headed by a band. It passed up Broad Street to Chestnut and terminated at the Continental Hotel where dinner was to be served. After dinner Mayor Henry of Philadelphia, with members of the City Council present, welcomed the President to the city. One of the reporters records that the President "responded briefly thanking them for their courtesy." The exact words used are not available.

The presidential party now augmented by the mayor, council members, and the fair reception committee left the hotel for the exhibition halls at 4:00 p.m. escorted by the First City Troop. A barouche drawn by two gray horses was the feature of the parade as it contained the most distinguished guests of the day the President, Mrs. Lincoln and their youngest son "Tad." Upon arrival at the fair the rest of the afternoon was spent in viewing the exhibits.

The speech making began at the banquet in the evening served at the fair dining room. After the toastmaster, Mr. Webster, had offered a toast to the President's health Mr. Lincoln arose and remarked: "I suppose that this toast is intended to open the way for me to say something," and he started his speech with the memorable words, "War, at the best, is terrible . . ." This was apparently his only prepared speech of the day. It was free from politics and dealt primarily with the military effort featuring General Grant.

The reporter for the *Chronicle* made this comment, "It has been my lot to listen to many addresses, but never have I seen such an enthusiastic reception given to a speaker before." Other speakers on the program were General Wallace, Edward Everett, Governor Cannon of Delaware, ex-Gov. Pollock of Pennsylvania, and Mr. Cadwalader of New Jersey.

The second recorded Lincoln speech of the day was the President's reply to the gift of a beautiful silver medal presented by the ladies of the fair. He also received a cane made from the arch erected at Trenton, N. J. in honor of Washington and Lafayette. Mrs. Lincoln presented a Japanese vase containing beautiful flowers to the fair and a toast to her war efforts by Edward Everett was offered. The following day she and Tad went on to New York for a visit.

Leaving the banquet the President and the distinguished guests proceeded in a torch light procession to the Union League and were welcomed by Daniel Daugherty, Esq. In reply Mr. Lincoln in a few brief words complimented the League on its patriotic endeavors and then concluded by saying, "It will now afford me pleasure to take each of you by the hand." As Lincoln left the clubhouse the crowd on the outside demanded a speech and the President again spoke but a few informal words thanking the audience for the demonstration. At this time he was whisked across the street to the National Union Club where he was formally welcomed by the president of the club. Here again he was pressed for a speech but explained that it was no occasion for a political talk but thanked the club for its kindness.

The presidential party retired to the Continental Hotel for the night. Escorted by Mr. Webster and Mr. Brown the Chief Executive left Philadelphia the next morning for Washington at 8:00 a.m.