



# Lincoln Lore

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## Was Andrew Johnson Present at Abraham Lincoln's Deathbed?

The charge was made by the political enemies of Vice President Andrew Johnson that he did not visit Abraham Lincoln on his deathbed the fateful night of the assassination. The only member of the Cabinet who did not call was Lincoln's Secretary of State, William H. Seward. He was almost fatally stabbed at the same hour Lincoln was shot, by one of John Wilkes Booth's conspirators.

Perhaps sixty-five people, at one time or another, for one reason or another, visited Lincoln while he lay upon his deathbed. These visitors were members of the family, personal friends, government officials, clergymen, doctors, soldiers, servants, politicians and curious bystanders who somehow eluded the guards.

The rumor still exists today that Johnson was so devoid of personal sympathy and so lacking in political acumen that he was guilty of this serious breach of etiquette. Many people believe this, despite the fact that the *Washington Star* of Saturday, April 16, 1865, mentioned the Vice President as being at the President's bedside at one time during the night following the great tragedy. However, one ingenious Lincoln biographer has explained that the *Star* reporter, being on the outside of the house where Lincoln died, heard or assumed that Johnson was present with the Cabinet.

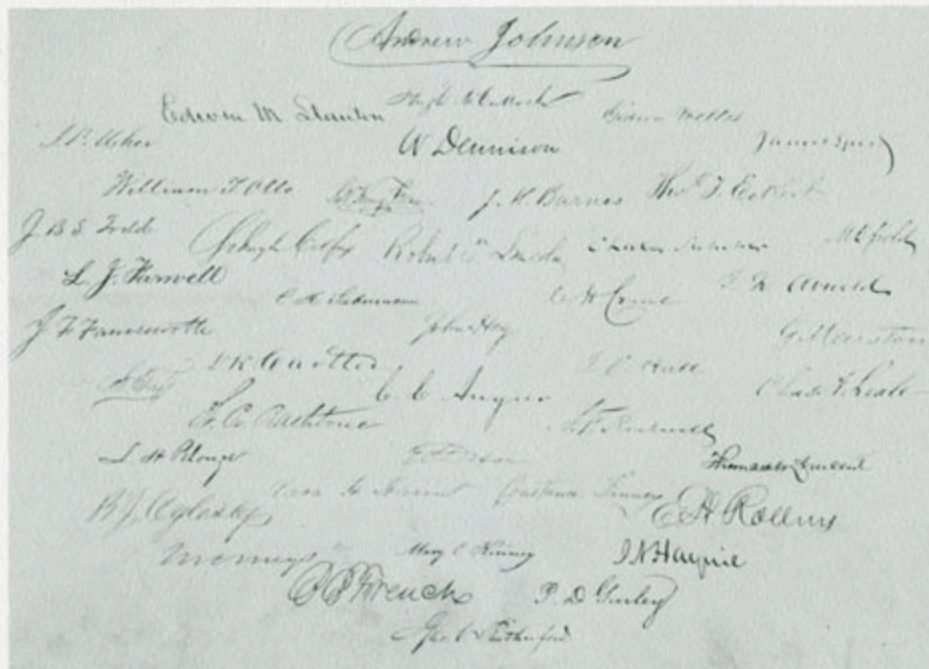
Corporal James Tanner, who lost both legs at Second Bull Run, studied stenography and he was summoned

from his room next to the Peterson House where Lincoln lay dying to take stenographic notes on the first examination of the witnesses of the assassination. The assassination occurred on the evening of Good Friday, and on Easter Sunday in a letter to a friend, Tanner mentioned that the Vice President was present. Yet, confronted with anti-Johnson evidence years later (he died October 2, 1927) "Mr. Tanner subsequently came to believe, . . . that he was mistaken about Johnson's having been there."

On the other hand, it is alleged by some that Johnson did visit Lincoln's deathbed, but that "his condition and conduct were such as to increase Mrs. Lincoln's grief, and that he withdrew."

Senator William A. Stewart of Nevada, in his "Reminiscences" edited by G. R. Brown and published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1908, stated that "Andrew Johnson had been drunk a month, was 'in with the conspirators', did not know of the President's death until seven or eight o'clock next day, when Stewart, Stanton, Chief Justice Chase and Foote woke him!" Furthermore, it was alleged "that Stewart went to Johnson's rooms at the Kirkwood House, roused him from a drunken sleep, took him to the White House and Stanton sent for a tailor, a barber and a doctor". This last statement can be easily refuted as Johnson did not occupy the White House until May 25, 1865.

One Lincoln biographer had the impression that if Johnson had actually visited Lincoln's deathbed, especially in a condition of intoxication, we would have more evidence on the subject.



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

Signatures (note that of Andrew Johnson) appended to the statement "We the undersigned visited the late President Lincoln at his bedside during his last hours. We have since sat for a likeness to be used expressly in the composition of the historical painting of that event, designed by John B. Bachelder and painted by Alonzo Chappel." These signatures appeared in an advertising broadside for the Bachelder-Chappel print "The Last Hours of Lincoln."



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

Dr. William E. Barton who wrote *The Life of Abraham Lincoln*, Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1925, was of the opinion that only this picture of Lincoln's death shows Andrew Johnson present. The biographer stated (Vol. II, pages 343-344) that "He is standing alone near the head of the bed and appears to have been inserted as an afterthought." This picture is in Raymond's *Life of Lincoln*. The print bears the title "The Death of Abraham Lincoln - April 15th, 1865." It was copyrighted in 1865 by Derby & Miller.

William E. Barton in his two volume biography, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln*, 1925, stated that "there are ten different contemporary pictures of the death of the President; only one shows Vice-President Johnson present. He is standing alone near the head of the bed and appears to have been inserted as an afterthought. The picture is in Raymond's *Life of Lincoln*."

This statement is not borne out by consulting the pictorial files of the Lincoln National Life Foundation. After making a study of some fifteen lithographs and



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

This photographic print entitled "Death-Bed of Lincoln - April 15, 1865" was copyrighted in 1866 by John H. Littlefield. John Goldin was the photographer and Wm. Terry the printer. Twenty-five people are shown around the deathbed of which twenty-four are identified as follows (left to right): Gov. Farwell (mentioned in this article as a friend of Andrew Johnson), Sec. McCulloch, Sec. Welles, Gen. Farnsworth, Vice-President Johnson, Judge Otto, Speaker Colfax, Dr. Stone, P. M. Gen. Dennison, Surg. C. A. Leale, Mrs. Lincoln, Maj. Jno. Hay, Robt. Lincoln, Senator Sumner, Surg. C. S. Taft, Dr. Barnes, Surg. Gen., Att. Gen. Speed, Dr. Crane, Sec. Usher, Rev. Dr. Gurley, Gen. Halleck, Gen. Auger, Sec. Stanton, and Gen. Meigs.



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

A photograph of a print entitled "The Death Bed of the Martyr President Abraham Lincoln - Washington, Saturday Morning, April 15th, 1865 at 22 Minutes Past 7 O'Clock." The print was published in 1865 by Currier & Ives, 152 Nassau St., New York. Eighteen people are gathered around Lincoln's death-bed and are identified as follows (left to right): Gen. Halleck, Gen. Meigs, Miss Harris, Mrs. Lincoln & son, Vice-Pres. Johnson, Surgeon, Mr. Colfax, Chas. Sumner, Capt. R. Lincoln, Chief Justice Chase, Sec. McCulloch, Surgeon, Sec. Welles, and Surgeon.

photographs of paintings of the Lincoln deathbed scene it was found that Johnson was included in more than fifty percent of them.

The most logical story of Andrew Johnson's activities during the period between the assassination and the death of Lincoln was written by former Governor Leonard J. Farwell, Wisconsin's first and only Whig chief executive. For a time Farwell resided at the Kirkwood House (now the present site of the Raleigh) where Andrew Johnson had rooms. The former Wisconsin



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

This photographic print published by Alexander Gardner in 1866 is incorrectly dated April 16, 1865. Andrew Johnson is included among the twenty people depicted. The picture bears the title "The Last Moments of Lincoln."

Governor became acquainted with the Vice President and occasionally passed an evening with him. Farwell's reminiscences, now the property of the Wisconsin State Historical Society reveal that he attended Ford's Theatre on the Evening of April 14, 1865, not to see the play, "Our American Cousin," but to get a glimpse of the Sixteenth President and his party. The theatre was located two blocks from the Kirkwood House.

Immediately following the assassination the former governor believed, and rightly so, that there was a conspiracy to take the lives of all the government officials,



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

A photograph of an original print bearing the title "Death Bed of Abraham Lincoln - Died April 15, 1865." All eleven persons shown around Lincoln's bedside are identified as follows (left to right): Sec. Stanton, Sec. Welles, Rev. Dr. Gurley, Surg. Gen. Barnes, Mrs. Lincoln, Robt. Lincoln, Andrew Johnson, Chas. Sumner, Sec. Dennison, Chief Justice Chase, and Sec. Usher. This print was published by J. H. Magee, 305 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Whoever drew this quaint print apparently suffered no qualms in depicting Andrew Johnson at Lincoln's deathbed.

which would include his friend the Vice President. Rushing with all possible speed to Room 68, Mr. Johnson's room, he related the tragic news. Meanwhile, guards were placed around the Kirkwood House. Momentarily Johnson was overwhelmed with the tragic news, but quickly recovering his composure, he sent Farwell on a mission to see personally both the President and Secretary Seward. This was no easy task but apparently the governor accomplished his mission and returned to report to Johnson. Thereupon, Johnson resolved to see the President himself. Buttoning up his coat and pulling his hat well down over his head, the Vice President requested Farwell to accompany him.

Meanwhile, the residence of Johnson became a focal



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

A photograph of an original print bearing the title "Death of President Lincoln at Washington, D. C., April 15, 1865. The Nation's Martyr." Of the twelve persons depicted in this picture eleven are identified as follows (left to right): Chase, C. J., Sec. McCulloch, Gen. Halleck, Chas. Sumner, Sec. Stanton, Sec. Welles, Robt. Lincoln, Surgeon Gen., Mrs. Lincoln, Tad and Miss Harris. The print was published in 1865 by Currier & Ives, 152 Nassau St., New York. It is believed to be the first state of the C & I print which later appeared with considerable refinements and a deletion of the head of Halleck and the insertion of the head of Johnson on the same body.

point of interest and Major James R. O'Bierne, provost marshal of the District of Columbia, called at the Kirkwood House. He, along with other friends, advised Johnson not to leave his hotel because of the danger, but he was adamant. Thereupon, O'Bierne insisted on sending a detachment of troops with the Vice President, but Johnson would not listen to the suggestion. Johnson did, however, ask Major O'Bierne to accompany him and Farwell — in a sense, to lead the way.

It was about two o'clock in the morning when the future Seventeenth President arrived at Lincoln's bedside. The call, of course, was most distressing. The un-



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

A photograph of an original print by Currier & Ives. This print bears the identical title to the one mentioned above. It embodies many refinements and corrections and depicts Andrew Johnson's head on the original body of General Halleck.

conscious Lincoln could speak no word to his successor who was destined, in eight hours, to take the oath as President. At the time of Johnson's visit all the company, except the family, the Cabinet and a few friends had departed. This may account for the reason General Thomas W. Vincent and General Thomas F. Eckert positively insisted that Andrew Johnson was not at the Peterson House at any time during the night.

In all likelihood Johnson's visit may have occasioned some jealousy on the part of the family, and some forebodings of doom on the part of the Cabinet members who were not yet ready to see the Tennessee politician installed in the highest position of the land.

After about half an hour, Johnson left and returned to the Kirkwood House. The hour of Johnson's call is further established by the two-thirty o'clock, April 15th edition of the *National Intelligencer* which carried the statement that "The Vice President has been to see Lincoln. . ." Then, too, Senator Sumner of Massachusetts wrote to John Bright that "About two P.M. the Vice President called at the dying President's bedside." The hour and date, furthermore, confirms the statement that "D. Massey, a witness talked with Andrew Johnson a



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

A photograph of a painting by Ritchie depicting twenty-six people around Lincoln's deathbed. While Andrew Johnson was not included in this scene, his good friend Governor Leonard J. Farwell appears among those present. (See Key)



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

Key to the Ritchie painting of Lincoln's deathbed.



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

A photograph of an original print bearing the title "Last Moments of President Lincoln - Washington, D. C., April 15, 1865." Of Some twenty-nine people present five are identified as (left to right): Welles, Chase, Sumner, Robt. Lincoln, Gen. Halleck and Stanton. This print bears the imprint of Buffords Print & Publishing House, 818 Washington St., Boston, Massachusetts.



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

A photograph of an original print bearing the title "Death of President Lincoln." and dated April 15, 1865. Of the twenty-three persons present twelve are identified as follows (left to right): Sec. Welles, J. Farnsworth, Justice S. P. Chase, Surgeon Stone, Schuyler Colfax, P. M. Gen. Dennison, Charles Sumner, Surgeon, Gen. Mead, Surgeon, Gen. Halleck and Secretary Stanton. This print was lithographed by Ed. Mendel of Chicago and was published by J. H. Campbell of Chicago

half-hour after he returned from the deathbed." Johnson's visit was also confirmed by both Jones and Savage who wrote biographies of the Seventeenth President.

The most convincing evidence that Andrew Johnson visited the dying Lincoln is to be found in a document



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

A photograph of an original print which bears no title and does not identify those present. No one resembling Andrew Johnson appears in the picture. The print was copyrighted in 1908 by H. H. Altschwager of Minneapolis, Minnesota.



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

A photograph of the original print bearing the title "The Last Moments of Abraham Lincoln President of the United States." The twelve men are identified as follows (left to right): Dennison, Halleck, Chase, Maj. Andrews, Stanton, Sur. Gen. Barnes, Peterson, Gen. Sumner, Welles, Robt. Lincoln, Speaker Colfax, and Maj. Gen. Meade. The print dated April 15, 1865 was designed by Jos. Hoover and was printed by L. N. Rosenthal, 327 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, Penn.

KEY TO THE LAST DAY OF LINCOLN, BY A. CHAPPEL, 1869  
PUBLISHED BY W. BAKER, NEW YORK, 1869.



- |                  |                 |                 |                 |
|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Pres. Lincoln | 11. Gen. Galt   | 21. Gen. Todd   | 31. Mr. Chase   |
| 2. Mr. Lincoln   | 12. Gen. Colfax | 22. Mr. Lincoln | 32. Mr. Lincoln |
| 3. Mr. Johnson   | 13. Mr. Stanton | 23. Mr. Lincoln | 33. Mr. Lincoln |
| 4. Mr. Johnson   | 14. Mr. Stanton | 24. Mr. Lincoln | 34. Mr. Lincoln |
| 5. Mr. Johnson   | 15. Mr. Stanton | 25. Mr. Lincoln | 35. Mr. Lincoln |
| 6. Mr. Johnson   | 16. Mr. Stanton | 26. Mr. Lincoln | 36. Mr. Lincoln |
| 7. Mr. Johnson   | 17. Mr. Stanton | 27. Mr. Lincoln | 37. Mr. Lincoln |
| 8. Mr. Johnson   | 18. Mr. Stanton | 28. Mr. Lincoln | 38. Mr. Lincoln |
| 9. Mr. Johnson   | 19. Mr. Stanton | 29. Mr. Lincoln | 39. Mr. Lincoln |
| 10. Mr. Johnson  | 20. Mr. Stanton | 30. Mr. Lincoln | 40. Mr. Lincoln |

From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

The key to the painting "The Last Day of Lincoln." Several differences can be detected between the engraving and the painting, the most notable being that of Mrs. Dixon (No. 17).

signed by the President attesting to the fact. The document is in the form of a broadside advertising for sale the photographic reproduction of "The Last Hours of Lincoln", a picture designed by John B. Bachelder and painted by Alonzo Chappel.

The document states "that we the undersigned visited the late President Lincoln at his bedside during his last hours. We have since set for a likeness to be used ex-



- |                        |                           |                        |                        |
|------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Pres. LINCOLN       | 11. Gen. WELLES           | 21. Gen. TODD          | 31. Col. FELLOWS       |
| 2. Mrs. LINCOLN        | 12. Sur. Gen. COLFAX      | 22. ROBINSON           | 32. Maj. WAY           |
| 3. Mr. JOHNSON         | 13. Dr. STANTON           | 23. Rev. Dr. GURLEY    | 33. Gen. MEIGS         |
| 4. Maj. HATHORN        | 14. Sur. Gen. BARNES      | 24. Asst. Surg. FIELD  | 34. Maj. ROCKWELL      |
| 5. Mr. ANDRUS M. C.    | 15. Mrs. Sen. DIXON       | 25. Asst. Gen. HAYRIS  | 35. Ex. Gov. FARWELL   |
| 6. P. M. Sen. DENNISON | 16. Dr. TODD              | 26. Maj. FRENCH        | 36. Judge CARTER       |
| 7. Sen. WELLES         | 17. Asst. Surg. LEALE     | 27. Gen. AUGER         | 37. Mr. ROBINSON M. C. |
| 8. Asst. Sen. SPEED    | 18. Asst. Surg. TAYL      | 28. Col. VINCENT       | 38. Gen. MARSTON M. C. |
| 9. Dr. HALL            | 19. Asst. Surg. UTTO      | 29. Gen. HALLECK       | 39. Mrs. WINNEY        |
| 10. Dr. LEIBHARMAN     | 20. Gen. FAHNSWORTH M. C. | 30. Sen. STANTON       | 40. Miss KINNEY        |
| 11. Mr. SUMNER         | 21. Sen. SUMNER           | 31. Col. RUTHERFORD    | 41. Miss HARRIS        |
| 12. Mr. COLLECK        | 22. Surg. CRANE           | 32. Asst. Surg. ECHART |                        |

From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

The key to the engraving "The Last Hours of Lincoln" was first published as an advertisement in Isaac N. Arnold's book *Sketches of the Life of Abraham Lincoln* which was published by John B. Bachelder, 59 Beekman Street, New York, 1869. It is understood, of course, that all forty-seven persons present did not call at the bedside at the same time.

pressly in the composition of the Historical Painting of the event, designed by John B. Bachelder and painted by Alonzo Chappel." Andrew Johnson's signature heads the list of forty-three names.

Bachelder arrived in Washington from New York City on the night of Lincoln's death and his design bears the date of 1865. The Chappel painting bears the date of 1868. The advertising broadside reveals, if the key to the painting is studied, that four people present did not sign the document; namely, General Henry W. Halleck, Mrs. Lincoln, Dr. Lyman Beecher Todd, her cousin, and of course, Abraham Lincoln.

Halleck was said to have been one of the few men in the room when Lincoln died. Immediately following Lincoln's death, Halleck no longer Chief of Staff, was ordered to Richmond, Virginia, to take over the department there. However, he was in Washington long enough to represent the Army at the Lincoln funeral service. Apparently, Halleck did not sit for a special photograph to be incorporated into the Chappel painting as did Andrew Johnson who has a position of honor (rocking chair) in the picture.

Why was Johnson accused of such a breach of etiquette? Why did the story circulate that the future President was too intoxicated to call at Lincoln's deathbed; that while he was "hors de combat" that he had to be slicked up to be presentable when he took the oath of President? This was nothing more than malicious elaboration of Johnson's unfortunate condition the day he was inducted into office as Vice President. This rumor was to initiate a whole series of vicious political attacks by the Radical Republicans who were trying to prevent Johnson from carrying out President Lincoln's mild and reasonable policies of reconstruction.