



# THE LINCOLN



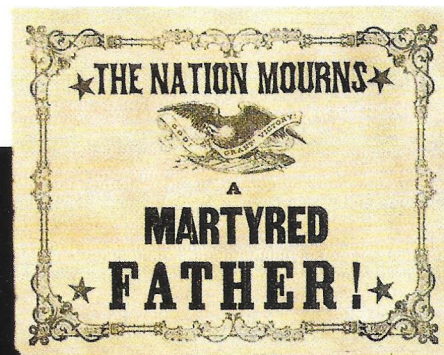
---

The darkly draped funeral train of Abraham Lincoln pulled into Harrisburg (facing page, bottom) late on the evening April 21, 1865. A broadside (below), printed and posted in Philadelphia, was one of many public notices along the route of the funeral train.

---

# LN TRAIN IS COMING!

by William C. Kashatus



*O*n Saturday morning, April 15, 1865, news of President Abraham Lincoln's assassination reached Philadelphia. The treacherousness of the crime created a mix of feelings surging from fear and horror to inconsolable grief. A galvanized nation began mourning immediately.

Printers cranked out broadsides that were posted throughout Philadelphia lamenting the "Martyred Father." Citizens shrouded theaters, hotels, stores, factories, even private dwellings, in black. Mourning wreaths appeared in public places. The city's governing councils passed resolutions ordering Independence Hall to be draped in a similar fashion and pledging support for the new President, Andrew Johnson. Philadelphians filed into their churches to remember the slain president, who, just

four years earlier, had paid his first visit to their city.

On his first visit to Philadelphia, President-elect Lincoln, a prairie lawyer chosen by a minority of the popular vote, had been considered by many to be ill-equipped for high office. Facing the insurmountable problem of holding the nation together as it moved hopelessly toward Civil War, he had stood in front of Independence Hall and had spoken of his strong reverence for the Declaration of Independence's underlying idea that "the weight should be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that *all* should have an equal chance." "If this country cannot be saved without giving up that principle," he had added. "I would rather be assassinated on the spot than to surrender it."

His words proved prophetic.



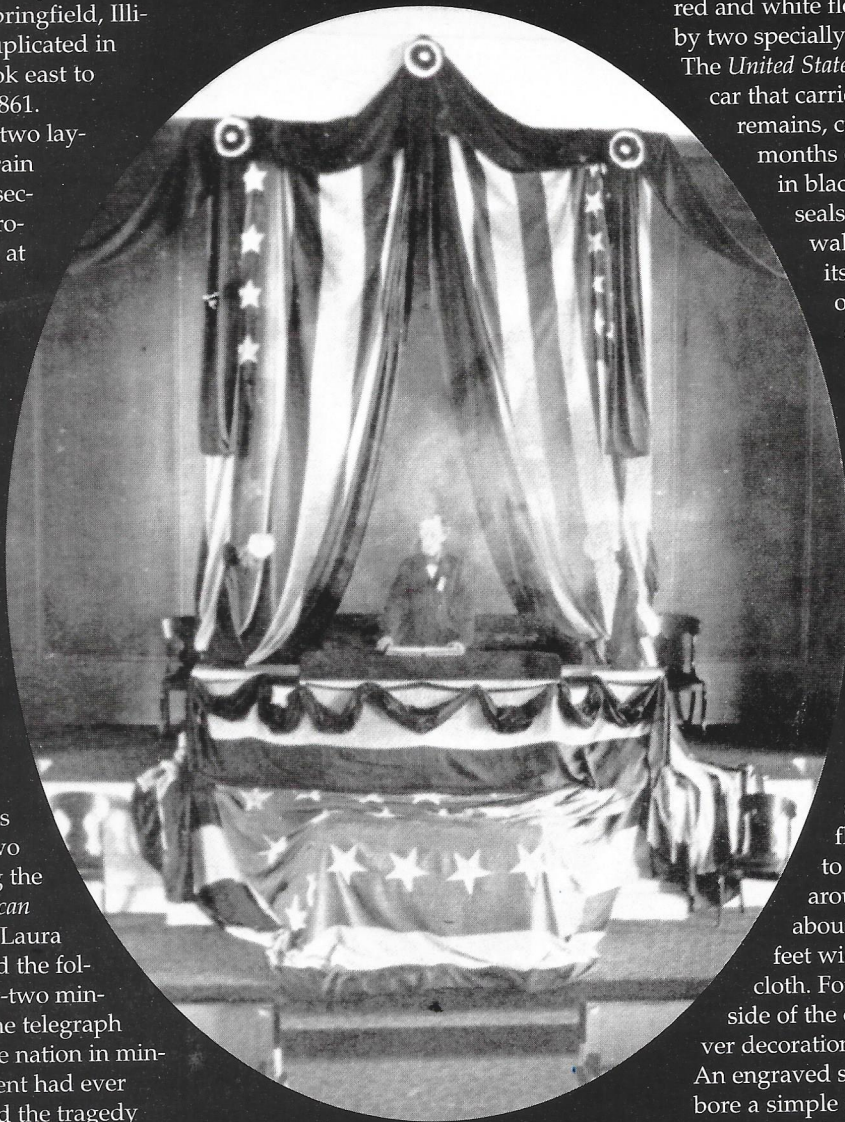
On Saturday, April 22, 1865, Abraham Lincoln returned to Philadelphia in a flag-draped coffin, the victim of assassin John Wilkes Booth (1839-1865). His remains lay in state at Independence Hall, one of twelve stops on a sixteen hundred and sixty-six-mile railroad journey that would eventually carry him back to his hometown of Springfield, Illinois. The journey nearly duplicated in reverse the same trip he took east to assume the presidency in 1861.

Philadelphia was one of two layovers the nine-car funeral train made in Pennsylvania; the second was Harrisburg. The procession also briefly stopped at York and Downingtown. Thousands of Pennsylvanians thronged the railroad tracks, many crying, "The Lincoln train is coming!" at the first sight of the lead engine that preceded the grim procession.

The public's fascination with Lincoln's death began almost immediately after his assassination on Friday, April 14, 1865, at 10:13 P.M. at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C., where he, his wife Mary Todd Lincoln, Major Henry R. Rathbone, and Clara Harris (who married Rathbone two years later) were attending the performance of *Our American Cousin*, a comedy starring Laura Keane (1826-1873). He died the following morning at twenty-two minutes past seven o'clock. The telegraph carried the news across the nation in minutes. No American president had ever before been murdered, and the tragedy triggered an outpouring of grief beyond anything the United States had ever known. People turned out by the thousands to pay their last respects in every city where the funeral train stopped.

Funeral services were held at the White House at noon on Wednesday, April 19, after which the president's coffin was taken to the United States Capitol. The president lay in state until Friday

morning, when a procession solemnly carried him to the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad depot. A small coffin containing the remains of the president's beloved son, Willie, who had died from typhoid fever three years earlier, at the age of twelve, awaited the mourners. Father and



son would be returned together to Springfield. At eight o'clock on Friday morning, April 21, the train departed Washington for Baltimore. About seventy-five people were on board, mostly federal troops. No women made the trip, not even Lincoln's widow, who, shattered and grief-stricken, remained behind.

A pilot locomotive, limited to twenty

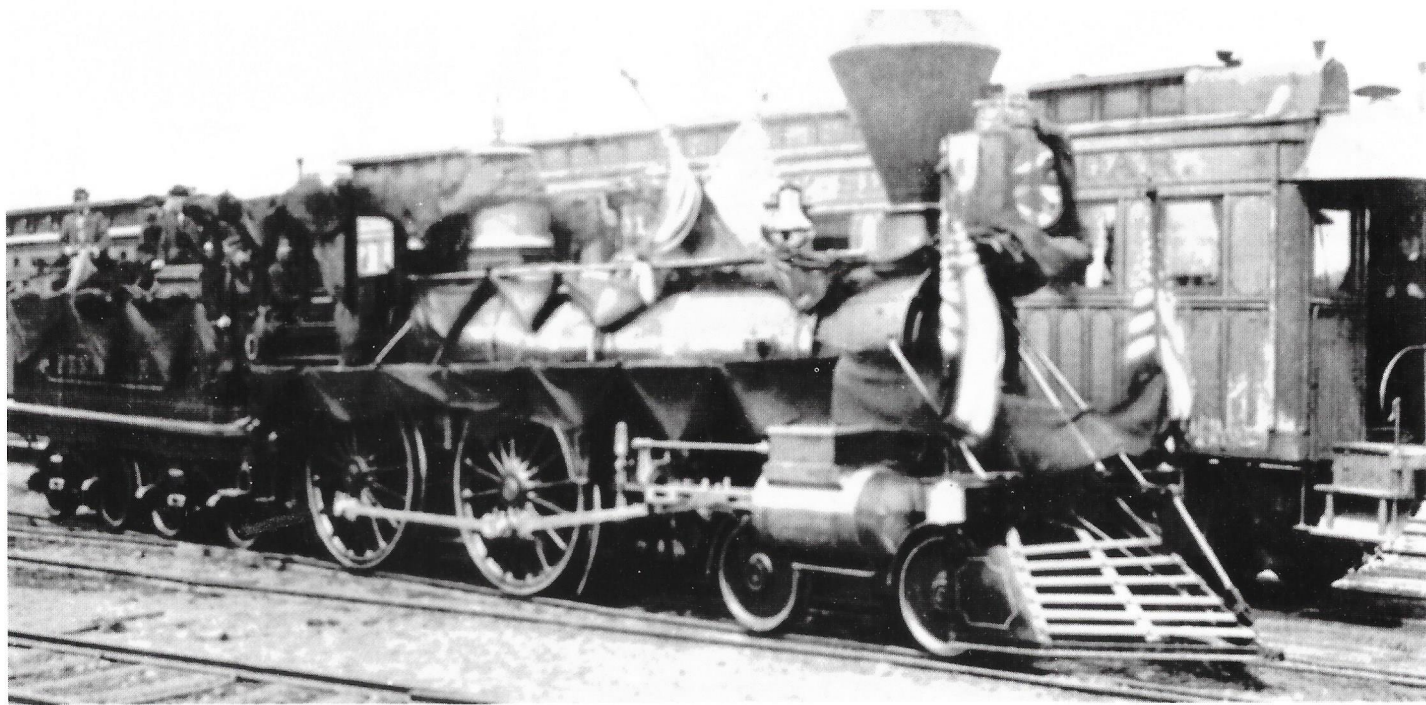
miles an hour—just five miles an hour through stations—preceded the train by ten minutes to signal its impending arrival and ensure safety along the route. The locomotive of the funeral train itself was darkly draped, with a large portrait of the president mounted on the front, above the cowcatcher, surrounded by a red and white floral wreath and bordered by two specially-made American flags.

The *United States*, a forty-two-foot-long car that carried the president's remains, completed only a few months earlier, was also draped in black. Only the presidential seals located on exterior side walls gave any indication of its passenger. The interior of the *United States* was outfitted more as an elegant drawing room than a railroad car.

Four red plush sofas lined the walls, which were upholstered with rich corded crimson silk. Cut glass chandeliers, wall-to-wall carpeting, and black walnut and oak woodwork gave the car an undeniable opulence. Amidst all the finery was the president's coffin, which rested on three trestles securely anchored to the floor. Straps were fastened to the trestles and buckled around the coffin, measuring about seven feet long and three feet wide and covered with black cloth. Four silver handles on either side of the coffin were outlined by silver decorations in the form of wreaths. An engraved silver plate affixed to the lid bore a simple inscription.

**ABRAHAM LINCOLN**  
 16th President of the United States  
 Born: February 12, 1809  
 Died: April 15, 1865





*The Reverend Charles A. Hay (facing page) preached a memorial sermon on April 23, 1865, in Harrisburg's Zion Lutheran Church. One of several locomotives used to pull the Lincoln funeral train on its lengthy journey was Pennsylvania Railroad's No. 331 (above).*

William Henry Harrison Gould, the conductor on the first leg of the journey, recalled seeing the face of the martyred president several times during the trip as the lid was removed from the coffin. "The body was dressed in black, with white shirt and black tie," said Gould. "I was informed that the suit he had on was the very same one he wore at his first inauguration. His face was calm and peaceful. He looked as if he was asleep in pleasant dreams." Lincoln seemed to have finally achieved in death the peace of mind for which he yearned throughout his life.

The president had long suffered from severe depression. His closest friends noticed that Lincoln, in the midst of a conversation, would slip away into a moody introspection, brooding over unspoken thoughts. The spells of melancholy at various times during his life were attributed to frustration over a political career that was not meeting his expectations, domestic unhappiness, and, of course, the bloody carnage of war.

Lincoln's law partner, William Herndon, observed his unsettling mood

swings, from "cheerfulness and rather humorous, to the sad, terribly gloomy state of an unfortunate and miserable man." Humor was an elixir for Lincoln, giving him the ability to "whistle down sadness." Quaint anecdotes to illustrate a more profound point, or mindless rib-ticklers often brought him back from the despondency, while sometimes irritating those around him. Yet the melancholia only seemed to enhance Lincoln's stature among those who knew him well, creating great sympathy because of the burdens of responsibility that weighed so heavily on him. Now, in death, Lincoln would be apotheosized as a martyr, the funeral train a sorrowful and dignified manifestation of his greatness.

At six o'clock on Friday evening, the train stopped briefly at York for water. An honor guard, Sergeant Luther Bulk, wrote that a "large crowd met us at the depot." Buildings "as far as the eye could see, were draped in mourning, and many appropriate mottoes were spread for our gaze, such as 'Give honor to who honor is due,' 'The Nation mourns,' and

many more." Six women entered the car and placed a three-foot wreath of red and white flowers on the coffin, moving to tears those who witnessed their touching gesture.

There were those who had traveled some twenty-five miles from Gettysburg to stand along the railroad tracks and pay their last respects to a president who had, only two years earlier, memorialized the Union soldiers who fell during the three-day bloodbath in Adams County. None of them would ever forget the majestic simplicity of the stirring words he had delivered on that autumn day. Lincoln's Gettysburg Address of November 19, 1863, would become the classic expression of American idealism by giving a powerfully new, unprecedented meaning to the phrase "all men are created equal" and a new birth of freedom to the nation (see "A New Birth of Freedom" by William C. Kashatus, Fall 1999).

After leaving York, the train slowly wound its way northward through the heart of the Keystone State. Despite the rain, Pennsylvanians, many of them





*In Philadelphia, on Saturday, April 22, 1865, cannon fire, tolling bells, and muffled drums accompanied throngs of mourners as they marched solemnly with Lincoln's elaborate caftalque along Broad Street on their way to Independence Hall.*

kneeling and weeping uncontrollably, crowded the trackside.

At eight o'clock, the train arrived at Harrisburg where Lincoln's casket was transferred to a gold and silver hearse by the honor guards, special volunteers of the Veteran Reserve Corps. For their service, each one of the twenty-seven guards would later be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, only to have it rescinded in 1917 when Congress limited the medal only to those who had displayed valor in combat. The caftalque slowly edged its way through the crowded city toward the State Capitol where a chaotic nighttime viewing was interrupted by heavy rains and occasional thunder and lightning. Nevertheless, thirty thou-

sand mourners crammed into the Capitol to see the president's remains. At midnight it closed.

Lincoln's face was blackening and had to be chalked and his body dusted before morning. Embalmer Charles Brown did the honors. Redressing the corpse in a clean collar and white shirt, Brown powdered the president's face and brushed his black suit, making the body look presentable for the public. From seven to nine o'clock the following morning, the State Capitol once again became a temple of mourning as thousands more filed past the open casket to pay their respects. "The president lies in sleep, but it is the sleep of marble," wrote George A. Townsend, a local newspaper reporter. "All that made

his flesh vital, sentient and affectionate is gone forever." At 9:30 A.M., a contingent of new pallbearers arrived and escorted the body to the railroad depot for its eleven o'clock departure.

Lincoln would have disliked all the pomp and circumstance. He saw death as an inevitable part of life, which, in his case, had very modest beginnings. Nor had he been unprepared for the inevitable. Just a few days before his assassination the president confided to his wife, that he had had a dream about his own death. "Before me was a caftalque, on which rested a corpse wrapped in funeral vestments," he explained. "Around it were stationed soldiers who were acting as guards; and there was a



throng of people, some gazing mournfully upon the corpse, whose face was covered, others weeping pitifully."

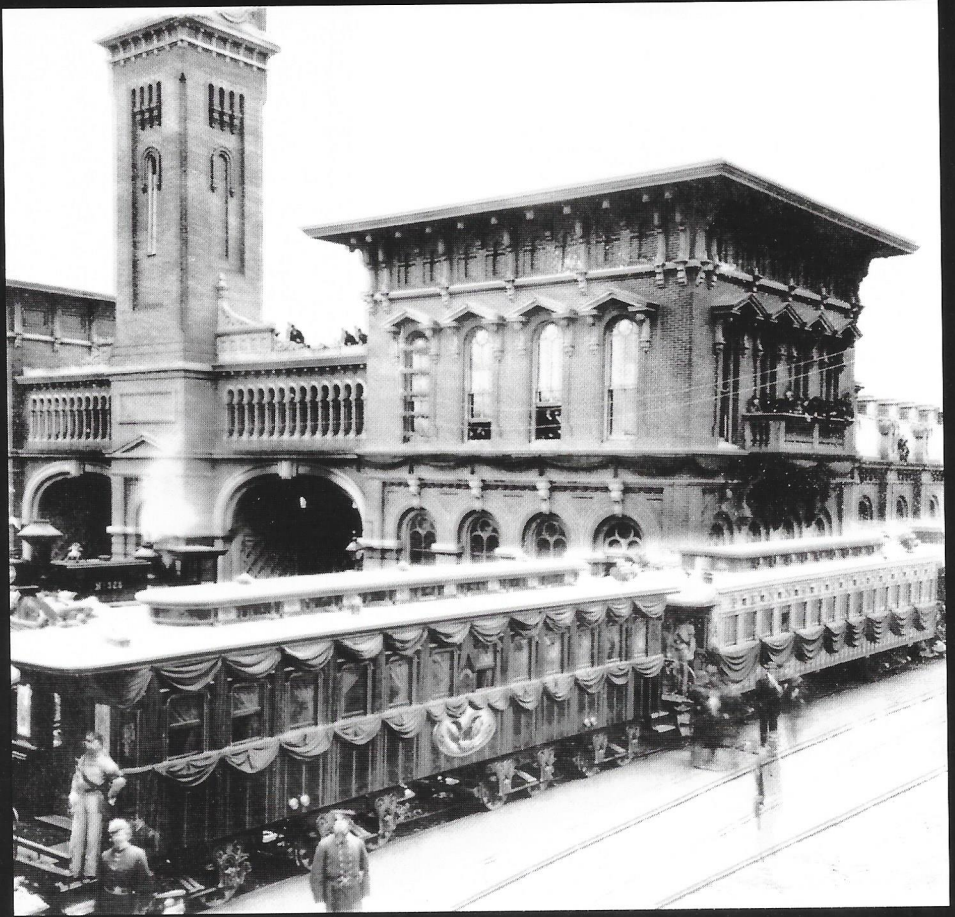
"Who is dead in the White House? I demanded of one of the soldiers."

"The President," was his answer; "he was killed by an assassin!"

As the train huffed eastward to Philadelphia, the black pageant was greeted by thousands who had come to say farewell to their president at every convenient point. Bands played with a muffled drumbeat. Guns were fired. Civil War veterans, their faces stained by tears, saluted their former commander-in-chief. Young girls wearing white dresses with black sashes tossed roses onto the railroad bed. Ministers led followers, on bended knee, in prayer and hymns. Young and old alike bowed their heads in reverence. This great mass of humanity came from miles around to mourn their fallen leader. Pennsylvanians considered Lincoln "one of their own." And with good reason.

The president's great-great-grandfather, Mordecai Lincoln, had settled in Chester County in 1720. Becoming one of three partners in the operation of Coventry Forge on French Creek, he is credited with being a pioneer of the early iron industry in Pennsylvania. In 1728, he had taken up residence in Amity (now Exeter) Township, in Berks County, where he had married and had leased a thousand-acre farm, which he later purchased. Mordecai Lincoln's oldest son, John, the president's great-grandfather, had purchased several tracts of land in Lancaster and Berks Counties, but had sold them in 1765 and moved to Virginia's Shenandoah Valley. John's son, Abraham, the president's grandfather, born in Pennsylvania in 1744, had emigrated with his father to Virginia and later to Kentucky.

Abraham Lincoln and Pennsylvania had become more closely associated in 1860 as he campaigned for the presidency. Since he was not then widely known outside his home state of Illinois, Lincoln's campaign manager, Jessie Fell, a native of Chester County, persuaded his candidate to write a brief account of his life for Pennsylvania's newspapers. After receiving Lincoln's version, Fell had made some additions and dispatched the work to several influential editors throughout the

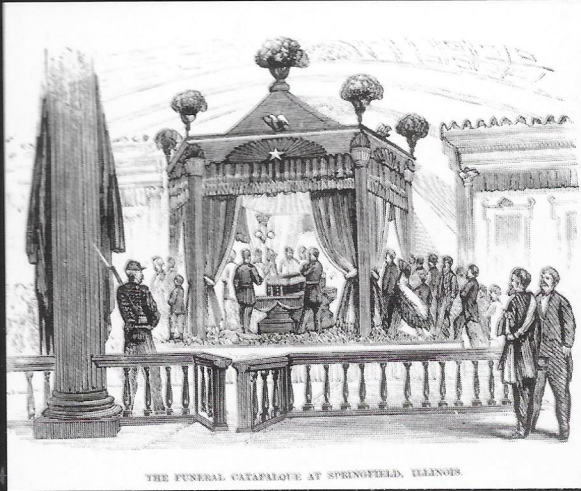


*Photographed in Harrisburg, the United States, the car that bore the body of Lincoln, was draped in black and decorated with the presidential seal. A violent thunderstorm prevented a formal procession from the train station to the State Capitol for an overnight viewing.*

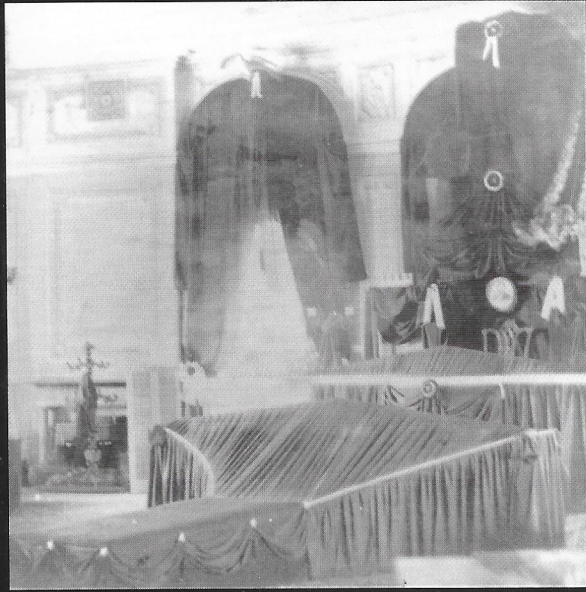
Commonwealth, as well as several eastern states. The biography first appeared in the February 11, 1860, edition of the *Chester County Times*, published in West Chester, but was soon published in several other newspapers, introducing Lincoln to the public as a serious candidate for the presidency. Three months later, on May 18, he had secured the Republican nomination at the party's national convention in Chicago. Fell's plan had worked so effectively that Pennsylvania had abandoned a native son, U.S. Senator Simon Cameron (1799-1889), and rallied for the "Illinois Rail Splitter," who was nominated on the third ballot. Five years later, West Chester mourned the slain president.

"The news of the assassination of President Lincoln reached our Borough by telegraph on Saturday morning last, and it spread as quickly as lightning," reported the *Village Record* on April 22. "In a few minutes it had reached nearly every family in West Chester, and was rapidly being communicated to the surrounding country. So sudden and unexpected was it, that for a time no one could believe it. Such a shock on our citizens was never before experienced. Soldiers who had faced the cannon's mouth, and men, old and young, who never knew what it was to weep, cried when they heard it, and everyone's countenance wore an expression of gloom and sadness."





THE FUNERAL CATAFALQUE AT SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS.



The open casket at Independence Hall as depicted in an 1865 book illustration (top). In Harrisburg's State Capitol building, the coffin was placed in the House of Representatives chamber (bottom), in which an upholsterer had the challenge of disguising the clerk's desk and other furniture with black cloth to create a catafalque.

One of the Chester Countians who bade farewell to Lincoln was Anna B. Temple, who recorded her memories in a diary entry dated Saturday, April 22, 1865. "The cars that contained the body of the president passed along the Pennsylvania Railroad about 3 o'clock this afternoon," the young Downingtown resident wrote.

"They were trimmed beautifully, all covered with black cloth and crepe, presenting a spectacle of deep mourning. There were five cars, one of which contained Governor [Andrew Gregg] Curtin. Body guards together with the State Militia were also along. Could our beloved president but awake from his slumbers and read in the hearts of the people in their sadness—he would say—'Is man thus honored.'"

Thundering cannons announced the funeral train's 4:30 P.M. arrival in Philadelphia, quieting the crowded streets of the city. The train pulled into the Baltimore and Ohio depot at Broad and Pine Streets and, again, members of the Veteran Reserve Corps unloaded the casket. Philadelphians would contend that their procession was more impressive than those held in other cities. Comprised of eleven divisions, the caravan was headed by a shiny, new hearse drawn by eight black horses in silver-mounted harnesses. The destination was Independence Hall.

From ten o'clock in the morning until midnight, Philadelphians paid homage to their beloved president. A three-mile-long line wound its way through the city to Independence Hall, where the front windows were removed and wooden planks for walkways erected in order to accommodate the thousands who hoped to file past the president's casket. As night fell, the crowd became restless. Some spectators were nearly trampled to death as rioting broke out.

Once inside the building, shock and disbelief overcame many. A grief-stricken black woman laid evergreen on the coffin and wailed, "Oh, Abraham Lincoln, are you dead? Are you dead?" Mourner

James Williams wrote to his sister "I cannot think or talk about the assassination. When I think of that good great man whom I really loved and of his cruel death, it makes me weep."

Even after Independence Hall closed, hundreds milled around the building through the night so that they might be among the first to pay their respects the following morning, rather than spend another four to five hours waiting in line.

The next day was Sunday. At dawn, the city's church bells began pealing. The doors to Independence Hall were opened, and an unbroken stream of men, women, and children filed by the president's casket until one o'clock the next morning. "Never before in the history of our city was such a dense mass of humanity huddled together," reported the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. "Hundreds of persons were seriously injured, from being pressed in the mob; and many fainting females were extricated by the police and military, and conveyed to places of security."

Shortly after 1:00 A.M., the procession recommenced its march, bearing the president's body to Kensington Station, where three hours later the funeral train left for New York. More than three hundred thousand people had viewed Lincoln's body.

By the time the train reached New York City, blackness had spread over Lincoln's entire face and the constant powdering could no longer camouflage the eerie duskiness. Worse, the president's jaw had fallen and his lips were glued together to keep his mouth from gaping. New York would be the last of the open-coffin funerals. Afterward, the lid would remain closed and screwed tightly down.

Photographer Jeremiah Gurney Jr. made several pictures of the dead president lying in state at New York's City Hall. Outraged by the incident, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton ordered Brigadier General E. D. Townsend, Adjutant General of New York, to "seize and destroy the plates and any pictures or engravings that may have been made." All but one small print were recovered and destroyed. The lone surviving image was given to Stanton who secretly kept it among his personal papers.





### **FUNERAL CAR,**

Used at the Obsequies of **PRESIDENT LINCOLN**, in Philadelphia, April 22d, 1865.

Designed and Built by E. S. EARLEY, Undertaker, South East Corner of Tenth and Green Streets, Philadelphia.

---

*A lithograph by Augustus and Charles Tholey recorded the funeral car designed and built by E. S. Early, an undertaker, for the obsequies of President Lincoln in Philadelphia on April 22, 1865.*

---

The funeral train made stops in Iban Buffalo, Cleveland, Columbus, Indianapolis, and Chicago before arriving at Springfield, Illinois. On May 4, 1865, twenty days after he was murdered in Ford's Theatre, Lincoln was finally laid to rest in, as he had requested, a "quiet place" at Oak Ridge Cemetery.

The *United States*, the railroad car that carried the president's body, changed hands over the course of the next half century. Among the various owners were the Union Pacific Railroad, which used it as an executive car; the Colorado Central Railroad, which stripped the interior compartments and used it as a simple day coach, and later, a lowly work car; and a former railroad magnate, Thomas Lowry, of Minneapolis, who restored the car to its original grandeur and exhibited it as the "most sacred relic in the United

States." On March 18, 1911, a brush fire spread to the car and destroyed it, leaving little more than memories of one of the grandest public spectacles ever played out on the stage of American history. And one that included a cast of hundreds of thousands, many of them Pennsylvanians.

The funeral train had served the nation well, providing a visual impression more memorable than mere newspaper accounts of assassination and burial ceremony. A rhetoric of deification began to surround references to Lincoln. Gone were the allusions to a baboon's profile, to a cynicism hidden in his crude jokes, to spineless compromising, and to usurpation of authority. The price paid for human equality and national unification had been paid on countless battlefields and could not be taken back. Now, the leader who had guided the land through those fateful years must have seemed to many to have taken his turn before the enemy's fire to provide the final payment for those principles. ❖

---

*William C. Kashatus, of Paoli, is a frequent*

*contributor to Pennsylvania Heritage.*

---

#### FOR FURTHER READING

Donald, David Herbert. *Lincoln*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995.

Kunhardt, Dorothy Meserve, and Philip B. Kunhardt Jr. *Twenty Days: A Narrative in Text and Pictures of the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln and the Twenty Days and Nights that Followed*. New York: Harper and Row, 1965.

Kunhardt, Philip B., Jr., et al. *Lincoln*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992.

Oates, Stephen B. *With Malice Toward None: The Life of Abraham Lincoln*. New York: Harper and Row, 1977.

Searcher, Victor. *The Farewell to Lincoln*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1965.

Slusser, H. Robert. *Mr. Lincoln's Railroad Car*. Alexandria, Va.: Alexandria Archaeology Publications, 1996.