

# 150 years ago, death of Lincoln stunned all

## William C. Kashatus

is the author of "Abraham Lincoln, the Quakers and the Civil War: A Trial of Principle and Faith" (Praeger, 2014)

**O**n the evening of Good Friday, April 14, 1865, President Abraham Lincoln was attending a play at Ford's Theatre in Washington when he was shot by the actor John Wilkes Booth.

Mortally wounded, Lincoln slumped forward in his seat. He never regained consciousness. The next morning, at 7:22, the president was pronounced dead.

No American president had ever been murdered before, and the news sent the nation into shock.

This week's 150th anniversary of Lincoln's assassination is a sobering reminder of a tragedy that triggered an outpouring of grief beyond anything the United States had ever before witnessed. The martyred president's funeral train traveled more than 1,600 miles from Washington, with stops in the nation's major cities, including New York, Buffalo, Cleveland, and Chicago, before arriving in Springfield, Ill., on May 3.

Within hours of the news of Lincoln's death, officials in the City of Brotherly Love were preparing a funeral procession that would culminate at Independence Hall on April 23. There, just four years earlier, Lincoln, "filled with deep emotion," had spoken of his reverence for the Declaration of Independence.

Public buildings were draped in black. Women's dresses were pinned with crepe bows of the beloved president's image. Schools and businesses were closed.

Emilie Davis, an African American diarist, noted that the city was in "deep mourning." Quak-

ers, who visited Lincoln during the war to offer spiritual support and lobby for emancipation, felt as if they had "lost a dear friend who redeemed our country from the dark stain of slavery."

At 4:30 p.m. April 22, Lincoln's dark-garlanded funeral train arrived at Broad Street Station, with an honor guard and about 300 mourners aboard. Thirty thousand Philadelphians turned out to meet the train. Some held signs lauding the dead president as "the illustrious martyr of liberty," "the Great Emancipator," and "Father Abraham."

Lincoln's coffin was placed on an elaborate hearse drawn by eight black horses and escorted through the city's jammed streets by a large military and civic procession. At Independence Hall, the flag-draped coffin was placed inside the East Wing beneath a statue of George Washington. An undertaker quickly chalked Lincoln's face to hide the inevitable discoloration.

"Tonight the ashes of the most illustrious Martyr of Freedom will rest in the Hall where the American Charter of equal rights was given to the world," reported the Evening Bulletin. "His body will rest at the feet of the most illustrious of the early Apostles of American Freedom."

Inspired by the symbolic pairing of the two presidents, an unknown artist depicted "the meeting of the two great saviors of the nation in heaven." The image was hurriedly issued as a commemorative print by W. Dinmore's Photographic Gallery at 730 Chestnut St.

From 10 p.m. to midnight, there was a private viewing for guests of Mayor Alexander Henry and City Council. The public viewing began the next morning at 6. Two long lines stretched for miles, one north to the Schuyl-

At 10 a.m., boys began selling places in line. At its peak, the wait was five hours long. Some attempted to jump the line. Others pushed back. The crush of people trembled on the edge of riot, especially after pickpockets were discovered among the crowd. By late afternoon, soldiers had restored order and silence pervaded the city, except for the occasional tolling of bells and reports of salutary cannon fire in the distance.

Inside the hall, mourners were not permitted to stop for even a second. Still, many had to be prevented from touching and even kissing Lincoln's face.

Just prior to midnight, 150 wounded Union soldiers, including 75 amputees, were ushered to the head of the line. They would be the last to pay their respects to the slain commander-in-chief in Philadelphia.

An estimated 300,000 people viewed Lincoln's open coffin before the hall was closed about an hour after midnight on April 24. Three hours later, the funeral train departed from Kensington Station for New York.

Not since the death of Washington had there been such a nationwide outpouring of mournful respect, Abraham Lincoln's funeral, and especially his viewing at Independence Hall, left an indelible mark on the city and the nation, inspiring his apotheosis from wartime president and emancipator to a secular saint.

In the process, Philadelphians and countless other Americans renewed their commitment to the causes he championed: the sanctity of the Union and a new birth of freedom for all, regardless of race.