

Lincoln

Lincoln's Speech in Pittsburgh

By Dale Hershey

Two hours late, the special train carrying Abraham Lincoln puffed into the Fort Wayne station in Allegheny City at 8 p.m. on February 14, 1861. The president-elect had already made 10 short whistle-stop speeches, beginning in the rain in Columbus before 8 a.m. Now, a downpour and a waiting throng met his arrival. His secretary reported that “we finally got Mr. Lincoln into a carriage, but having accomplished that, it looked for a while as if we would never get the carriage out of the crowd.”¹

Lincoln came to Pittsburgh on a special mission. The city was far off the path of his journey from Springfield, Illinois, to Washington, D.C. He was headed from Columbus to Cleveland and Buffalo and then to Albany, N.Y., and on to Washington. Between Columbus and Cleveland, however, he swept over to Pittsburgh for a special speech, the longest he would make on his inaugural journey.

At the time of his visit, Lincoln and the nation faced an overwhelming question: would the United States remain intact or be broken apart? In the weeks preceding Lincoln's journey, seven deep-South states set up a rival government, calling it the Confederate States of America. Other southern states remained on the fence. Tennessee rejected secession by popular vote on February 9. Virginia, Maryland, Kentucky, and Arkansas had not committed to the Confederacy. How would Lincoln defuse this conflict?

In speeches along the way, faced with a fluid crisis, Lincoln hesitated to spell out a policy in detail. He would reserve that for the inauguration. But he was indeed prepared; during the journey, Lincoln carried a carpet bag containing his inaugural address.

Lincoln planned to meet his supporters in Pittsburgh and discuss matters other than secession. He wanted to remind residents that

there were other important issues such as tariffs to protect local industries and jobs, a platform on which Lincoln had run. Lincoln wrote out part of his Pittsburgh speech before he left home. But, even before Lincoln took office, the departure of Southern opponents of tariffs from Congress made it possible to reverse the low rates enacted in 1857.

The rain-soaked crowd, estimated at 10,000, followed Lincoln to the Monongahela House at the end of Smithfield Street. Inside he stood on a chair and made a few friendly remarks. In the election of the preceding November, Pittsburgh, Allegheny City, and all of Allegheny County had given Lincoln a larger vote than he received in any of the other cities he visited en route to his inauguration. His first words shortly after he arrived at the hotel lobby included praise for the county of his overwhelming electoral victory. “I have a great regard for Allegheny County. It is ‘the banner county of the Union,’” he proclaimed.² Lincoln knew he was among friends.

At 8:30 a.m. the next day, he delivered his speech from the hotel balcony to an eager, also wet audience. He begged off any discussion of secession because to do so “would perhaps unnecessarily commit me upon matters which have not yet fully developed themselves.” He argued that the crisis was “an artificial one,” that it was “gotten up by turbulent men, aided by designing politicians.” Turning to the tariff, “a subject of great magnitude,” he acknowledged that there was much debate about rates, but clearly the government depended on the tariff for revenue, and industry benefitted from protection. The Republican Party plank calling for a higher tariff, he noted, “should be regarded as law for the incoming administration.”³

After the speech, when Lincoln emerged from the hotel, “a shout went up that rent the



The Monongahela House
where Lincoln stayed en route to his inauguration. HCL&A.

heavens, and Coal Hill gave back the joyful sound.”⁴ Returning to the rail station, his carriage passed under a banner stretched across Smithfield Street that read: “We are for the Union as it is, the Constitution, and the enforcement of the laws.”⁵ More people gathered to see him off at the station, where he kissed a boy and three girls. Then his train departed, backtracking to Ohio and then continuing on to Cleveland.

Lincoln had talked himself hoarse.

Dale Hershey graduated with a history degree from Yale, where he was an assistant to the editors of *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*. He also graduated from Harvard Law School, where he was an assistant to the editors of *The Legal Papers of John Adams*. He teaches, lectures, and writes on Lincoln, plus practices law and teaches business law and ethics at the Tepper School of Business at Carnegie Mellon University.

¹ Michael Burlingame, ed., *With Lincoln in the White House* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 27, quoting John Nicolay.

² Roy P. Basler, et al, eds. *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 4:208-09.

³ Ibid, 4:210-13.

⁴ *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, February 15, 1861.

⁵ Ibid.

Opposite page: Lincoln wore his signature stovepipe hat when he visited the Antietam battlefield near Sharpsburg, Maryland, October 3, 1862. Courtesy Library of Congress.

The Lincoln Bed

By Nicholas Ciotola

Lincoln slept on this ornate bed during his stay at the Monongahela House hotel. After the president's visit, hotel owners renamed the bedroom in his honor. For many years, visitors came from far and wide to stay in the prestigious Lincoln Room. On the eve of the hotel's demolition in 1928, the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania (the History Center's parent organization) came to the bed's rescue and preserved it for posterity. In February 1961, civic leaders brought the bed

out of long-term storage and displayed it to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Lincoln's Pittsburgh visit. Afterwards, it disappeared from popular memory. A group of Allegheny County employees re-discovered the bed in 2005 at the back of an old storage warehouse. The History Center is now its permanent home.



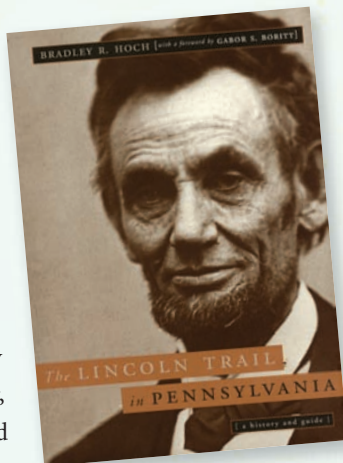
Lincoln's Monongahela House bed. Photo Mike Mackin.

Lincoln at the Monongahela House

By Bradley R. Hoch

An excerpt from *The Lincoln Trail in Pennsylvania*

Lincoln traveled in the downpour toward the Monongahela House Hotel at One Smithfield Street in Pittsburgh by way of Federal, St. Clair, Market, Fifth, and Smithfield streets. The remainder of Lincoln's party followed in other carriages. The Pennsylvania Dragoons, the Jackson Independent Blues, the Washington Infantry, the committees of reception, city council members, a band, and local citizens walked



behind. At 9 p.m. they arrived at the Smithfield Street entrance of the Monongahela House. The crowd, estimated at four thousand people, was so dense that soldiers needed bayonets to clear a passage for Lincoln to walk from his carriage into the hotel.

The president-elect entered a packed Monongahela House Hotel lobby. Amid cries for a speech, someone found a chair. Lincoln removed his coat, gave it to a friend, and stood on the chair in the midst of the lobby. "I have a great regard for Allegheny County. It is 'the banner county of the Union,' and rolled up an immense majority for what I, at least, consider a good cause.... I could not help thinking, my friends, as I traveled in the rain through your crowded streets, on my way here, that if all these people were in favor of the Union, it can certainly be in no great danger—it will be preserved."

Lincoln went to his room to get his notes for his intended speech but was persuaded to postpone it until morning. He appeared briefly on the hotel's Smithfield Street balcony "only to afford you [the crowd] an opportunity of seeing, as clearly as may be, my beautiful countenance! In the morning at half-past eight o'clock I propose speaking to you from this place. Until then, I bid you all good night." The crowd below roared back, "Good night!" Inside the hotel again, Lincoln was introduced to a few local citizens and then retired to his room. Half an hour later and slightly drier, he was finally able to eat supper with family and friends.

The Lincoln Trail in Pennsylvania: A History and Guide

By Bradley R. Hoch
(University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001)

The Lincoln Trail in Pennsylvania is available for purchase from the History Center's gift shop and e-store: www.heinzhistorycenter.org

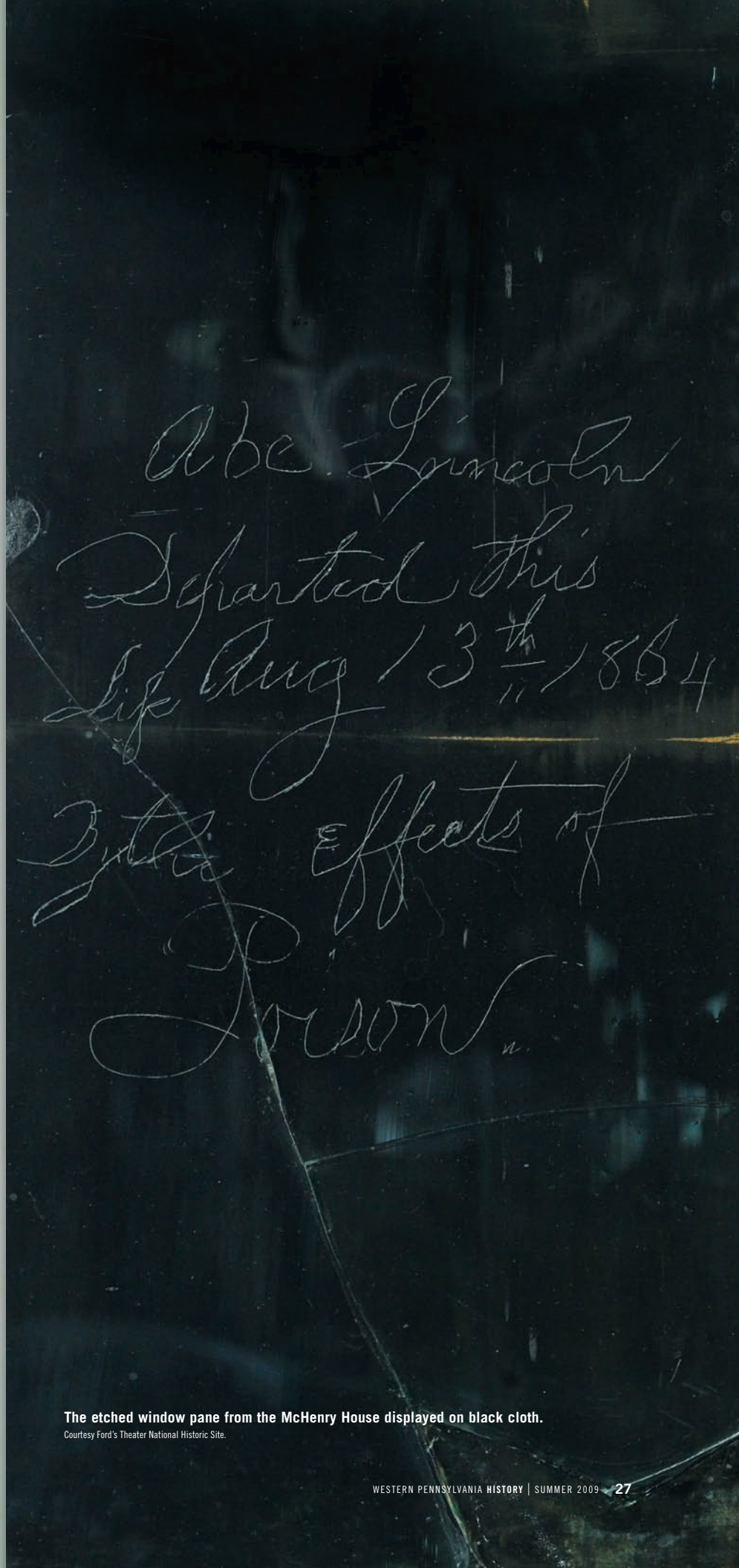
John Wilkes Booth and the Meadville Window Pane

With contributions by Anne Stewart,
historian, Crawford County Historical
Society, and Terri Blanchette, Heinz History
Center Community Programs Director

A recurring pain to local historians is the tale of John Wilkes Booth scratching "Abe Lincoln Departed This Life August 13th, 1864 By The Effects of Poison" on the windowpane of McHenry House, a Meadville, Pa., railroad hotel for the Atlantic & Great Western. Yes, Booth did on occasion stay at the McHenry House, where he most likely changed trains on his way to the Franklin, Pa., oil fields to try and strike it rich. But no, he was not registered there on the date the window was scratched upon, which was months before the assassination that was, as we know, not by poison.

So who wrote the mysterious and inaccurate omen? Because the register and the room were not cross-checked, we don't know. But it might have been a traveler who picked up information, which the railroad telegraph had relayed, that such an attempt had been successfully made. This incorrect assassination information was short-lived, however. The August 16, 1864, issue of *The Crawford Democrat* reports the report was contradicted within a matter of a few hours.

Someone sent the pane and a cut-out of a Booth signature to Miss McHenry when the McHenry House was razed, and they eventually ended up in the Ford Theater museum, where Historian Anne Stewart saw them around 1960. Along the way, the pane came up broken and was then sent to the Department of Interior warehouse at Harpers Ferry. The pane, determined to not be a "relevant artifact," now resides in storage at Ford's Theater in Washington, D.C.



The etched window pane from the McHenry House displayed on black cloth.
Courtesy Ford's Theater National Historic Site.