

Mr. Lincoln Goes to Washington

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As newly-inaugurated Confederate President Jefferson Davis began the task of forming a cabinet and organizing a new government from scratch in Montgomery, Alabama, president-elect Abraham Lincoln would finally arrive in Washington, D.C. on February 23, 1861 in anticipation of his own inauguration. Prior to leaving Springfield on February 11, Lincoln had spent time preparing his inaugural address, as well as meeting and corresponding with advisors and various political figures. He and Mrs. Lincoln held a farewell reception at their home for some 700 friends and acquaintances on February 6. Five days later his party left the Springfield Train Depot for the long journey to Washington, a trip interrupted by stops at numerous cities along the way. Before leaving, he gave a brief address to the crowd of about 1,000 who had gathered to see him off. "To this place, and the kindness of these people," he noted, "I owe everything."

Lincoln travelled first to Indianapolis, where he briefly met with the governor and members of the legislature before leaving for Cincinnati. While enroute to the latter location he gave brief speeches from the back of his train as it stopped at a number of Indiana towns. The scene would be repeated numerous times over the next two weeks, as his train wound through the Midwest and northeast towards the nation's capital, stopping at cities and towns for impromptu speeches, receptions, and meetings with local and state dignitaries. While in Ohio on February 13 he learned that the Electoral College, meeting in Washington, had officially confirmed his election. On February 15 he spent time in Pittsburgh and Cleveland before heading to Buffalo, and Albany, New York. By the nineteenth Lincoln had reached New York

City, where he stayed at the Astor House and spoke briefly to a large crowd. He also met with New York Mayor Fernando Wood and with vice-president-elect Hannibal Hamlin. Lincoln's speeches during the trip were generally vague. While confirming his desire to preserve the Union, he wanted to make no statements that might inflame public sentiment in the south. "It is most proper I should wait, see the developments, and get all the light I can," he stated at one stop, "so that when I do speak authoritatively I may be as near right as possible."

From New York, Lincoln's party journeyed to Philadelphia, stopping enroute to meet in Trenton with the New Jersey legislature. While in Philadelphia, he attended an event commemorating Washington's Birthday, held at Independence Hall. Lincoln also received the disconcerting news of a possible plot to assassinate him when he passed through Baltimore. At his next destination, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, aides determined to revise Lincoln's travel plans in order to thwart any threats on his life. Consequently, while the itinerary for the remainder of the president-elect's party stayed the same, Lincoln himself, accompanied only by longtime friend and bodyguard Ward Hill Lamon and detective Allan Pinkerton, took a special, unmarked train to take them through Baltimore and to the nation's capital. The train arrived safely in Washington early in the morning on February 23. The pro-southern cartoonist Adalbert John Volck would publish a satirical portrayal of Lincoln peering out of a boxcar as his train snuck through Baltimore.

While in Washington prior to his inauguration, the president-elect stayed at the fashionable Willard's Hotel. On the day that he arrived in the capital, Lincoln met with a variety of politicians, including fellow Republican William Seward, President Buchanan and his cabinet, an Illinois congressional delegation, and delegates from the Peace Convention who were then meeting in Washington in hopes of enacting a compromise measure to avoid armed conflict.

Similar meetings continued over the next several days, with Lincoln visiting both houses of congress and the Supreme Court on February 26, while he also made plans for his cabinet appointments. Meanwhile throughout the country, Americans north and south looked anxiously to the new president's inauguration on March 4.