

At Lincoln's First Inauguration

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AT LINCOLN'S FIRST INAUGURATION.

BY CHARLES ALDRICH.

Considering the season of the year, and the means of reaching the end of the railroad, it was a long journey from Webster City, Iowa, to Washington, D. C., in that stormy February of 1861. There were two methods of reaching the railroad, which was a little over a hundred miles distant, either by the Western Stage Company's vehicles, or by private conveyance. Under the circumstances I chose the former. In the pleasant summer time the Western Stage Company ran a two-horse coach from the end of the Dubuque and Sioux City railroad (now a part of the Illinois Central system), to Ft. Dodge. But when the snows were deep they used a common two-horse sleigh, and sometimes a "jumper" or "pung." When the mud was deep in the summer a common lumber-wagon sufficed to carry the passengers and the mails. These old wagons had a wonderful proclivity for getting stuck in sloughs, and it was often jocularly advised that each passenger should provide himself with a fence-rail in order to pry out the wagons when the good horses could not pull them through. It may be well to state right here that the Western Stage Company's pioneer manager was Thomas McChesney, who had long been in their employ on the lines in our section of the State. He was a man of energy, sometimes a little emphatic in his use of language, but thoroughly informed as to every detail of the work under his charge. He knew the drivers, and most of the horses, and looked after the various properties of the Western Stage Company with an eye single to the interests of his employers. Many times he came through our way ahead of the mails, and when stopping at the stage stations became a sort of oracle, giving the people all the news that was afloat at the end of the railroad. In this way he was

a very popular man, and deserved his popularity for his genial nature and efficiency as a manager.

About the middle of February I made an arrangement with him for a seat in his sleigh, which was to pass Webster City about that time. In those old snow-storm days you could not always rely upon promptness in this mode of transportation. I remember distinctly the pleasant morning when the sleigh arrived, stopping for me in front of the old Town Hall, which disappeared more than thirty years ago. The morning was mild and pleasant, and the sleighing simply superb. For fellow passengers there were Capt. Charles B. Richards, a long time resident of Ft. Dodge, with his wife and little son, Charles, now a leading business man of San Diego, Cal. There was just one vacant seat, and when I looked to see who occupied it, I found that I was "booked" to sit beside A. S. White, editor and publisher of *The Sentinel* at Ft. Dodge. The preceding year had been one in which political feeling ran high. White and I had had some very forcible discussions, and were not indulging in the kindest feeling for each other. In fact, we had not spoken together for six months. But there was no alternative, I had to take my seat by his side. We each attempted to say "good morning," but I am of the opinion that it was a mumble, rather than any distinct enunciation. For many a mile we were simply coldly respectful towards each other. But happily we both thawed out by degrees, and entirely forgot our political troubles. East of Webster City about a dozen miles was the first stage station, where a town had been laid out and christened "Hawley." It was supposed to have been located on the railroad, but the line was finally established a couple of miles south, and "Hawley" never rose above the dignity of a "stake town." At the present time it has no place on the local maps.

We traveled merrily along without any incident that I can now recall, until we reached a point in the Beaver Valley some twenty miles west of Cedar Falls. We there put up at the stage station, which was kept by a jolly old farmer by the name of Peck. We had a very pleasant evening and the night closed in with every prospect that we could get an early start the next morning. But when daylight came a howling blizzard was wildly careering over the prairies, rendering travel

both difficult and dangerous. We had no choice but to remain there the next two days. We amused ourselves by playing euchre, parching corn by the open fireplace, and reading such antiquated literature as we found lying about the house. I think it was the third morning that we were able to leave, and slowly make our way through the snow-drifts to Cedar Falls. From there to the end of the railroad, which I believe was at Manchester, the roads were well broken, and we glided along in very satisfactory style. I give my own recollection, but on recently meeting Captain Richards, at San Diego, Cal., he insisted that owing to the snowed-up condition of the railroad, we continued by stage to Dubuque. But recollections will vary, like our watches, after the lapse of nearly fifty years. The only incident, however, that I recall was the upsetting of the sleigh and the dumping of all the passengers in a heap together. No one sustained any injuries, for we alighted in a snowbank, from which we soon extracted ourselves and went ahead.

From the time we reached the railroad until we arrived at Washington City I have little recollection of the remainder of the journey. I think it must have been pleasant, for we had a jolly company, and we were full of ambition to witness the inauguration of Mr. Lincoln, which was to take place on the 4th of March. I cannot now recall the number of days we were in Washington preceding the inauguration, but probably five or six. I remember that I experienced a profound feeling of disgust when I contemplated the great number of office-seekers who had crowded into Washington at this time. It was doubtful whether we had a country or not, but that seemed to make no difference with men who wanted consulships, Indian agencies, postmasterships, and almost anything else in the gift of the appointing power. A friend of mine at Ft. Dodge was very anxious to secure an Indian agency, and begged me to say some good words for him to our delegation in Congress. I carried out my promise to him, but he failed in securing the appointment.

The days dragged along slowly, but finally the 4th of March dawned upon the Federal City, and everyone was bestirring himself in preparation for the great event of the century. I had secured a ticket with which I could obtain admission to

the Capitol building and possibly a seat in the gallery of the United States Senate Chamber, where some of the proceedings were to take place. I preferred, however, to join the crowd outside, in the hope that I could get close enough to the stand to hear the great Inaugural Address. At that time very little had been done in the way of decorating the grounds on the east front of the Capitol. Across the street from the northeast entrance there still stood a high board fence. These boards were set up on end, and were far from being a graceful addendum to the landscape. The platform had been erected about half way up the northeast steps, and extended in the direction of the street. There was a multiplicity of seats provided for such people as could gain admittance. At the outer edge of the platform a wide board was set up on its edge, and formed the back of the seat from which the occupant could face the President while he was speaking. Stephen A. Douglas sat at the south end of this front row of seats, occupying a place in the corner. For myself I had heard him speak in the United States Senate and in Tammany Hall, New York City, and was quite familiar with his appearance. I went across the street a distance of ten or twelve rods and selected standing-room with my back against one of those tall boards. The area in front of this northeast corner of the Capitol was filled with spectators to the number of many thousands. It was described by the reporters as "a sea of upturned faces." Just before the appearance of Mr. Lincoln, a file of soldiers, doubtless regulars, came into the area, and marched along in front of the platform, slowly making their way through the crowd. From where I stood I could see their bayonets above the heads of the people. There was at that time very serious apprehension that the President might be shot when he appeared to make his address, but this small company of men was all that was in sight in the way of defense. It was quietly understood, however, that several hundred men were scattered through the crowd armed with revolvers. Had any hostile hand been raised against the President its owner would very speedily have bitten the dust. It was a very solemn and almost gloomy time, because there was a universal consciousness that we were just on the outbreak of war.

However, the assembled multitude had not long to wait before President Lincoln appeared, walking alone through the door that led to the portico outside of the Senate Chamber. He walked quickly down the steps to the front of the platform. Removing his hat he looked around for some place to dispose of it. From where I stood I plainly saw Stephen A. Douglas reach for the hat and the President yielded it to him. It was stated afterwards in the papers that Mr. Douglas quietly remarked: "Mr. President, I will take your hat." Some of the newspaper people who were sadly lacking in reverence stated that "Mr. Douglas could not be President himself, but that he held the hat of the man who was." The next movement on the part of Mr. Lincoln was thrusting his hand into his right breeches pocket and taking out a steel spectacle case. He opened this with a snap and drew out a pair of spectacles, which he instantly placed before his eyes. At that time he could not make a movement, however slight, which did not elicit rounds of applause. When he removed his hat, when he put on his glasses, and when he restored the steel case to his pocket, there were loud cheers. He took his place at a table which had been conveniently placed, and drew out the manuscript of his inaugural address. The first words he uttered were—"Fellow citizens of the United States!" It seemed to everybody who heard him that he dwelt upon and emphasized the word "united." At all events, his expression was greeted with loud cheers. From this time until the close of his address his auditors were loud in their applause. I never listened to a speaker whose enunciation was so clear and distinct as that of Mr. Lincoln. You not only heard every word that he uttered, but every sentence was most clearly expressed. I believe his voice was perfectly audible to every one of the people who occupied the acres before and around him. At the close of his address he was greeted with deafening cheers, which seemed to carry with them an expression of highest confidence in the President.

When he concluded he stepped to one side of the table upon which lay an apparently well-worn copy of the Bible. The oath of office was administered by Chief Justice Taney—the President kissing the Bible—after which the people who oc-

cupied the platform and steps arose and slowly filed into the Capitol. The address was already printed and was at once upon the streets. I know that it was as profoundly satisfying to the people present, as it was to the loyal people of the whole country.

During the remainder of that day it was quietly noised about among the Iowa politicians that the President would receive them in the East Room of the White House on the next afternoon. At that time there were sixty or seventy gentlemen from our State who had come to be present at the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln. We were all introduced to the President by Hon. Josiah B. Grinnell, who seemed to know everybody from our State and was well acquainted with the President also. This presentation went off quite rapidly; in fact, it was very formal. The President pronounced our names as he took each by the hand and we speedily passed on with those who had gone before. Just ahead of me was a gentleman by the name of George May, who was a well-known pioneer of Marion county. In his boyhood he had known Mr. Lincoln, but he did not expect any recognition on that account. Mr. Lincoln, however, shook his hand and allowed him to pass along, when he turned around, and taking one of his long strides, put his hand upon Mr. May's shoulder and turned him about. "Are you George May, the son of my old friend, ——— May?" George merely bowed an affirmative assent to this inquiry, but Mr. Lincoln detained him a few seconds, during which time he showered him with a whole lot of questions. "When did you come down, George? How long do you expect to remain? Come around here again before you leave. I want to have a visit with you." George blushed like a modest girl and passed on. The politicians who were present and witnessed this little episode were in accord upon the proposition that George May would get whatever he asked for. After the reception was over we were received by Mrs. Lincoln. I believe that we were also presented by Mr. Grinnell. She merely bowed as each name was announced, and that part of the reception was speedily over.

A day or two after the events last recited the Iowa politicians were accorded a reception by Gen. Winfield Scott. Everybody who has read American history knows that he was the hero of the war in Canada during the last unpleasantness between this country and Great Britain. He was also sent to Mexico to supersede General Taylor, through some misapprehension in the politics of that period. Old Zach Taylor was doing well enough, and the American people requited his disappointment in being removed from command in Mexico by making him President of the United States. But all this did not detract from the great soldierly merits of General Scott. I cannot now recall the place where we found him. It seems to me, however, that it was at some point a block or two northeast of the Capitol grounds, but about this I am not certain. He had been apprised that we were coming and received us very cordially. The old man was dressed in a simple morning gown of some cheap material like quite ordinary calico. He bore the marks of extreme old age. His eye was bleared and the skin on his face and hands was much discolored, as we occasionally see it in aged people. He stood firmly on his feet as we were presented to him, and took each of us cordially by the hand. I had a great admiration for his past career as a soldier and was proud of the opportunity to meet him. He was then in chief command of the loyal armies of the country, and seemed to be our sole dependence so far as military ability was concerned. But as a support in such a time of need I could not repress the feeling that he was a very frail one. Not long after this, however, Congress passed a law which placed him on the retired list. He lived some years afterwards and took deep interest in the success of the northern armies. His occasional addresses were all on the side of loyalty and devotion to the Union.

It has always been a matter of great gratification to me that I was able to see the illustrious President, as I did on those two occasions, and the great General who had won undying fame upon bloody fields in Canada and Mexico.

I spent the evening of the third of March in the Gallery of the United States Senate. Seated at my left was Captain

Richards, and on my right Mr. Grinnell. We heard disloyal speeches by Wigfall of Texas, and Joseph Lane of Oregon, and a marvelous address by Andrew Johnson of Tennessee. It was this great address which commended Andrew Johnson so warmly to the people of the north, and four years later made him Vice-President of the United States.

FAST DAY IN IOWA.

Proclamation: Whereas, the past Winter has been one of special trial and destitution to many of our people, on account of which we should humble ourselves before Him who directs us in ways and to ends unseen by human wisdom, according to His own pleasure; and whereas abstinence from food, accompanied with religious humiliation and the prayer of faith, in seasons of public distress, are recorded among the general duties of all Christian communities, I, therefore, would respectfully recommend Friday, the 22d day of April next, to be observed by all the people of this State as a day of fasting, humiliation and prayer, that thereby we may propitiate a kindlier providence and "be fed once more with the heritage of Jacob."

In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the great seal of the State of Iowa. Done
 L. S. at Des Moines this 28th day of March, A. D. 1859,
 and of the Independence of the United States the
 84th, and of this State the 13th.

By the Governor, RALPH P. LOWE.

Elijah Sells, Secretary of State.

St. Charles City Intelligencer, April 14, 1859.

PRAIRIE FIRES are now raging in this vicinity, and each evening, as they are fanned by the night breeze, the flames blaze forth in every direction, lighting up the whole heavens with a lurid glare and giving them an aspect at once beautiful and sublime.—*St. Charles City Intelligencer, March 3, 1859.*

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