

Was a Day of Great Sorrow



The Assassination of President Lincoln Thirty-Four Years Ago Still Fresh in the Mind of the People—How the News of the Tragedy Was Received in Grand Rapids, April 15, 1865.

It was just 34 years ago yesterday that the sad news swept over the country that "Honest Old Abe," the martyr president, had died by the assassin's knife. Doubly sad was it because of the frame of mind in which it found the people. The tidings of the surrender of Lee's entire army and the probable downfall of the confederacy had but the week before thrown the country into an ecstasy of joy, and the celebrations of that glad news were still going on and on the faces of all the smile of great joy reflected the feeling of every heart. Then like the bolt from the clear sky fell the news that Lincoln had after years of toil in behalf of his loved country at last made the supreme sacrifice and had crossed the river to enter into the welcome that surely awaited him on the other side.

To those who were living at that time the recollection of that dark 15th of April is still as fresh as if the happening had been but yesterday.

Harvey J. Hollister was at the time living in the city and recalls most vividly the scenes of what he terms the saddest and strangest day he ever spent.

Said Mr. Hollister in describing how the news was received here: "My wife and I were walking down to the bank together about 9 o'clock in the morning and the first thing which attracted our attention was the strange actions of the people on the street. On the face of every one we met we noticed a look of the most abject sorrow. So remarkable was it that we became most anxious to know the reason. It was but a week before that we had helped to celebrate when the news of Lee's surrender reached us, and we thought that the war was over and now the people looked more sombre than after the greatest defeats

which passed over the populace at the time when the news of the death of the president reached here. On April 8 the editor wrote of Lee's surrender thus:

The end has come. The morning is so far advanced that the sun of peace shows his edge above the horizon, presaging a cloudless day—a day that shall not go down again until time shall be no more—a day that shall glow with universal freedom and blossom with progress.

Last night the nation lay down divided, distracted, bleeding—a giant in battle-harness matched against his brother. This morning we wake, still in battle-harness, the greatest, grandest, freest, most powerful nation on earth. Today our kindly, generous, wise, great-hearted president, Abraham Lincoln (whom nations attempted to sneer down but yesterday), stands the central figure of the nineteenth century. "Honest Old Abe" stands at least one hundred feet taller than any other ruler in Christendom today.

There is but one fleet in all of the world whose flag had been floated and been tried in actual battle; and Vice Admiral Farragut waits the order of President Lincoln whither to direct its thunders.

There is but one army of veterans in the world—privates and generals—and Lieutenant General Grant directs that, with Sherman and Sheridan, Thomas and Meade as his lieutenants, and with Robert E. Lee and his host as their captives.

And over this ruin and this triumph, this fall and this glory, brothers strike hands again, and the states unite in the old but grander family circle as one nation, under one flag, with one president. And freedom seals the compact for all. The Declaration of Independence belongs now to all the states, and the souls of the martyrs of liberty are marching on with John Brown's.

Let the bells ring, then, and the cannon thunder. Let all our citizens join in the demonstration of joy. Let us hold one grand, universal, enthusiastic joy meeting this evening at some suitable place, either within or without doors, and congratulate each other. Let every building in the city blaze with light this evening.

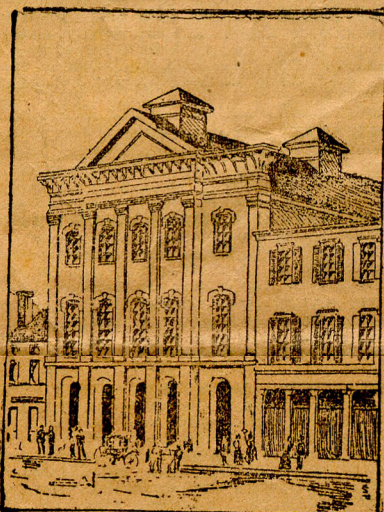
How different sounds the words of the same writer in the next issue, on the 15th:

"Vale!" "Vale!" The wine of life is spilled; the royal cup of fine gold is broken. Domestic faction, with horrible instruction, has taught the nation the utter malignity of secession. Treason has done its worst, and on our noblest. The bloody dagger's point has reached the nation's soul, with poison in its wound, to carry grief, horror and consternation through our veins; and as the numbness of the shock wears off, and the healing begins, it will wake a fever of fury whose end and effect none can foretell.

The times are dark again. Sudden and disastrous eclipse has rushed upon the morning of peace and returning fraternity, but a moment since without a cloud upon its glory, or a chill in its breath of balm.

All is again uncertainty; state policy and chance, government and faction, law and anarchy, freedom and slavery, battle and truce, revenge and mercy, order and chaos, jostle each other in the dark, and no man can see whither the majestic ship of state (whose cable has been cut in the night by the assassin's knife,) is drifting; whether out of this event shall come evil or good to the nation and the world; whether we shall again moor in the haven of peace and union, or have but opened the harbor to be mocked with our last glimpse of national brotherhood.

The president is dead—the greatest, purest, kindest soul Heaven and man ever conspired to crowd with public honors—the surest, safest, truest friend, leader and reflex of the people. Great beyond his times, he was at once the greatest, grandest hero of history and the kindest and commonest of the crowd of men. His last act was a benediction. Rather than disappoint the populace who expected his presence at the theater, he went to his death, though both he and his wife were ill; thus falling a sacrifice in this little, this homely, this common and natural act, which his death has



FORD'S THEATER, WASHINGTON.

which we had suffered. Men would stop and look into each other's faces and then as they shook hands, tears would begin to roll down their cheeks and they would separate without a word.

"At last we reached the telegraph office and found it crowded with a lot of silent men. Leaving my wife outside, I crowded in and soon learned the sad news. It is impossible to describe the utter feeling of bewilderment which possessed us all. I felt as if the very ground had been cut from under me. We had by that time come to know and appreciate the magnificent qualities and infinite wisdom of the president and each man that morning wept as though he had lost a dear friend or some member of his own household.

"The grief at that time was different from that which I ever saw before or since in its personal character. The common people had come to have implicit confidence and trust in the wisdom of the president and when the news reached us that he was gone it was as though we had suddenly been told that our last and only hope had failed.

"Business was stopped at once and all places were closed and the mayor issued a proclamation that all flags be hung at half mast and that all business cease for the day. The people crowded into the streets and meetings were held which were all pervaded by the same spirit of absolute grief which was reflected in the face of every passerby. Monroe street was one mass of black from head to foot and the residence portion of the city was all draped; everything of a black color being utilized to express in this only available way the intense sorrow which was in every one's heart. The next day which was Sunday, the services in every church were of a memorial character and Lincoln's greatness was eulogized by men who struggled with their emotions and who utterly failed to find words to express the sorrow they felt. At first it was thought that the work was that of emissaries of the confederacy and the wrath of the people found vent in the imprecations against a power that would avail itself of the assassin's knife to bring about its unholy purposes.

"I recall exactly the words which one man said when he turned from the office after hearing the news. They were: 'Well, the south has lost the best friend she ever had,' and as he spoke the tears ran down his cheeks in torrents."

Two editorials clipped from the Grand Rapids Eagle of the issues of April 8 and 9 show the strong revulsion of feeling



J. WILKES BOOTH.

guided with immortality. He was of the people; he died in a sense for the common people. He was the pattern of the common people and the ripe fruit of American democracy; at the same time the unchallenged peer of history, and the certain master of living greatness. Heaven's evident and commissioned instrument he was crowned with success and with immortality in the same week.

Secretary Seward dies with his master and his friend. So two great souls—the greatest, in all, that the world held in all its bounds—step into glory abreast, both crowned with all that makes life honorable, and both clothed with that raiment that makes death glorious. Such a pair, so matched and sustained in all good graces, so loved and mourned, have never in one hour knocked at the pearly gate nor met such glorious welcomed within.

Such was the spirit of the people admirably reflected in the columns of the paper of the day which was itself printed with every column surrounded by lines of deep black.

During the subsequent days excitement ran high and when it was heralded abroad that the assassin had been run down and shot the people only regretted that he met with such an easy fate.

short time we knew what had happened. The audience was all excitement at once, and we didn't know but what the plot was to include part of these who sat in the body of the house, for there were lots of southern sympathizers in Washington at the time.

Saw Lincoln Only Twice.

The retails of that sad affair are familiar to everyone, and need not be repeated now. I saw Abraham Lincoln but twice in my life; when he was on his way to Washington to be inaugurated, and once as he was driving down Pennsylvania avenue. I did not see him at Ford's theater, as the curtains of the box where he sat were drawn. A few days after he was assassinated, from the roof of a building, I watched the procession as they escorted his remains to the capitol. I looked upon his noble face for the last time as he lay in state in the great rotunda of the capitol. When President Lincoln was on his way to Washington he stopped at the Jones house, which is now called the Commonwealth hotel, in the city of Harrisburg, and which at that time was run by my uncle, Wells Coverly, and I was there the day that Abraham Lincoln stopped there. I was recently reading an article in one of the magazines which seems to convey the idea that when he left this hotel he went out the back door and got into a hack. The facts are that in order to avoid the great crowd that had gathered in front of the hotel to catch a glimpse of him, he was taken from the hotel through a hall to the private residence of my uncle and from there took the hack. I stood on the sidewalk when he came out, and saw the people down the street watching for him at the hotel entrance, and a great many of them saw him when he got into the hack, but none recognized him, and he was aboard cars and speeding away before the crowd found that he had gone.

Since that April night in Washington I have traveled over this country of ours a great deal, and although there was a large crowd at the theater, I have never met, to my knowledge, a single person that was there. I had witnessed many sad and exciting scenes on the battlefields in the war that was then going on, but nothing that I ever experienced gave me more of a shock than did that tragedy when we realized what had happened. That night, and the days immediately following, were the most exciting times I ever saw. Little did I think at that time that I should live to see our people, who were divided and embittered, reunited, and the federal and confederate soldier fighting side by side under the stars and stripes."

WAS PRESENT AT FORD'S THEATER.

Big Rapids Merchant Talks of the National Horror Enacted 34 Years Ago at Washington.

Special to Grand Rapids Herald.

Big Rapids, Mich., April 15.—J. P. Huling, one of our leading merchants, was present at Ford's theater, in Washington, the evening that has since gone into history as marking one of the greatest tragedies of modern times. President Lincoln was assassinated by J. Wilkes Booth, April 14, 1865, 34 years ago today, and Mr. Huling, in response to a request, told his personal experience substantially as follows:

"I served during the rebellion in Company C, Seventeenth United States infantry, and after receiving my discharge, I visited the city of Washington on business, arriving there April 14, and that evening, by invitation of James T. Hale,

the representative in congress from my district, the Eighteenth Pennsylvania, accompanied him to Ford's theater, where we expected to pass a pleasant hour or two. As we strolled down to the theater, we little thought that in a short time the whole nation would be bowed in grief at a tragedy which was to be enacted in our presence. We passed to our seats and soon the curtain rose and the play proceeded. After Booth had committed his shocking crime and leaped from the booth to the stage, my friend and myself, who were both familiar to the play, were saying that we could not recall anything like that when seeing the play at other times. Then there was quite a stir among the audience, and two or three men leaped upon the stage and from there into the president's box, and in a