Abraham Lincoln
In Philadelphia
Since last year, the bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln’s birth, I have been thinking a lot about our 16th president. Not coincidentally, last June 16, I spent the better part of the afternoon strolling and so thinking through Logan Square, the site of the only official visit of Lincoln as President to Philadelphia, 145 years before.
Yes, Lincoln was here on six other occasions: on June 7-9, 1848 at the Whig Convention which nominated Zachary Taylor; Feb. 25, 1860 to change trains and to attempt, unsuccessfully, to meet with Pennsylvania Sen. Simon Cameron and Pennsylvania Congressman David Wilmot at the Girard House Hotel; Feb. 21-22, 1861, to speak at Independence Hall on the way to his first inaugural; June 23 and 25, 1862 to change trains on his way to and from a secret meeting with retired Gen. Winfield Scott at West Point, N.Y.; and, finally tragically, on April 22-24, 1865, in death, lying in state in the East/Assembly Room of Independence Hall. But he was not visiting as President any of those times. In fact, on each of those visits (except the secret ones), he was only a private citizen, a lawyer, and a prairie lawyer at that. Not even a Philadelphia lawyer.

No, his only official Philadelphia visit as President came on June 16, 1864, accompanied by wife, Mary Todd Lincoln; Secretary of State William H. Seward; and one of his two secretaries, John G. Nicolay, to attend the U.S. Sanitary Commission Great Central Fair, which covered the whole expanse of Logan Square, the same land that spreads out 28 floors below my law office at Two Logan Square.

My great-grandfather, Milton Jared Tillery, and 90 other relatives of mine fought for the Confederacy and I was born and raised in the Deep South, but I have shared the nation’s enduring love for The Great Emancipator since an early age. Growing up in New Orleans, whenever I walked through The French Quarter near the Café Du Monde, I often thought of Lincoln’s two early visits to the Crescent City (1828 and 1831), where he was deeply moved by the obscene sight of slaves chained for sale at auction, not far from where tourists now so blithely consume beignets and coffee with chicory.

Four score and nine years before I was born, President Abraham Lincoln was here, not a block from where I now practice law. Sadly, no plaque marks that historical spot.

1848 – WHIG CONVENTION

In February 1848, Lincoln, the only Whig congressman from Illinois, thought it would “not be convenient” for him to attend the party’s national convention, but, anxious about its outcome, changed his mind and set out for Philadelphia on June 6, 1848 to attend as an unofficial observer. The convention was held at the Chinese Museum Building, at the Northeast corner of 9th and George (now Sansom) streets. The site would later become a part of The Continental Hotel where Lincoln would stay on his visits as President-elect in 1861 and as President in 1864.

Lincoln favored his political hero Henry Clay, but came to support the eventual nominee, Louisiana slaveholder, political neophyte and hero of the Mexican War, Zachary Taylor, because Lincoln knew only Taylor could win. He joined a group of congressmen supporting Taylor, the “Young Indians,” lead by Georgian Alexander H. Stephens, later vice president of the Confederate States of America.

Although not a delegate, Lincoln, the Lone Star of Illinois as he was then being called, was carried away with the excitement of events and attended a rowdy “ratification meeting” of the delegates in Independence Square, south of Independence Hall, after the convention adjourned. Only 17 years later, his lifeless body would be carried by an honor guard through the same spot to lie in state, with the Liberty Bell at his head, inside the Declaration Chamber of Independence Hall.

1860 – SWITCHING TRAINS AND MISSING POLITICIANS

On his way to New York City to make the speech that made him President, his brilliant Cooper Union Speech of Feb. 27, 1860, Lincoln made a brief stop in Philadelphia to change trains and to try to consult with two political allies and leading Pennsylvania politicians, Sen. (“Boss”) Simon Cameron [he of the aphorism, “An honest politician is one who, when he is bought, stays bought.”] and Congressman David Wilmot [he of the eponymous Proviso].

In those pre-Amtrak days, the nation’s railroads were a hodgepodge of lines owned by various companies that seldom connected, even in cities like Philadelphia. In order to travel from Washington to New York, through Philadelphia, one arrived at the Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore Railroad Depot (a/k/a Southern & Western Railway Station) at Broad and Prime (now Washington Avenue) streets and then traveled 3½ miles through the streets to the Kensington Depot of the Philadelphia and Trenton Railroad at Front and Berks streets.

When Lincoln detrained at the PW&B Depot, he was handed a note asking him to meet Cameron and Wilmot at the Girard House Hotel at 825-27 Chestnut St. The Pennsylvania politicians were not there when Lincoln arrived, so he hurried off to the Kensington Depot and just made his train to New York.

Although Cameron did not last in the position, he served as Lincoln’s first secretary of war. And Lincoln had a special
fondness for Wilmot, claiming to have voted for his famous Proviso (which would have prevented slavery in lands taken from Mexico) more than 40 times.

1861 – EN ROUTE TO FIRST INAUGURAL

On Election Day in November 1860, despite longstanding Southern sympathies, Philadelphia gave Lincoln 52 percent of the vote – not bad in a three-way race and far better than New York delivered for him. Expecting a positive reception in Philadelphia, on Feb. 15, 1861, the President-Elect accepted an invitation of the Philadelphia Select and Common Councils to visit the city on his way to Washington to be inaugurated and set a date of Feb. 21, 1861. He looked forward to seeing Independence Hall again. Unlike 1848, this time he would be able to enter and speak in the hallowed halls where the Union he would fight so hard to preserve was actually created. To his dismay, however, three days before his visit, on Feb. 18, 1861, the Confederate States of America swore in former U.S. Sen. Jefferson Davis as its first and only president.

More than 100,000 people welcomed President-Elect Lincoln and Mrs. Lincoln to the city at the Kensington Depot on the afternoon of Feb. 21, 1861. He then spoke briefly to a large, enthusiastic crowd from the Chestnut Street balcony of The Continental Hotel at the southeast corner of 9th and Chestnut streets.

Although the multitude probably heard not a word, Lincoln, in brief remarks, responding to an introduction by Mayor Alexander Henry, promised to work with a “sincere heart” to “restore peace and harmony and prosperity to the country.” Referring to the teachings of the “holy and most sacred walls” of that “sacred hall” where the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence were framed, Lincoln waxed Biblical, “May my right hand forget its cunning and my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I ever prove false to those teachings.”

He retired to dine with his wife in an adjoining room and then met with a delegation of local politicians lead by Judge James Milliken seeking to get “Boss” Cameron appointed to his Cabinet. Thereafter, Lincoln was honored at a private reception in the hotel.

THE BALTIMORE PLOT

But there was intrigue in the air. While a Lincoln imposter appeared on the balcony confusing, then amusing the crowd, a real and serious ruse was being planned in the well-appointed suites of The Continental. Chicago Detective Allan Pinkerton, in the employ of the PW&B Railroad, the line between Philadelphia and Washington, claimed to have uncovered a rebel plot to assassinate Lincoln as he passed through Baltimore. Urged to change plans and rush to Washington, Lincoln was both skeptical of this conspiracy talk and honor-bound to speak the next day in Philadelphia and then in Harrisburg. He refused to alter his plans or dishonor his commitments, even when Frederick W. Seward, son of his soon-to-be secretary of state,Sen. William H. Seward, came to him with similar information, possibly from sources other than Pinkerton’s.

Although still wary of the veracity of this information and the wisdom of the course being suggested, Lincoln reluctantly agreed to alter his travel arrangements so that he would return from Harrisburg, through Philadelphia and Baltimore in the dark of night. Elaborate, secret arrangements were quickly made which included a special Pennsylvania Railroad train, the cutting of all telegraph lines to Harrisburg, the sidetracking of all other trains, and the President-Elect wrapped in an overcoat and substituting a black slouch hat for his trademark stovepipe hat.

The next morning, before the stealth leg of his journey, with his young son Tad at his side, Lincoln addressed Philadelphia’s Select Council briefly inside Independence Hall and then the public outside. In what he called a wholly unprepared speech, Lincoln said, “there is no need for bloodshed and war,” that “the government will not use force unless force is used against it.” And that he said nothing but what he was “willing to live by… and… die by.”

Then, on the 129th birthday of George Washington, Lincoln raised the new 34-star American flag over this storied edifice. The 34th star represented “Bleeding Kansas,” finally admitted as a free state on Jan. 29, 1861. Then he was off to Harrisburg and his secret, midnight journey into the nation’s capital.

Lincoln came to regret skulking into Washington, even more than he did his “jumping scrape,” when in 1840, he and some other Illinois legislators tried to prevent a quorum for
a vote by throwing themselves out a second-floor window. Defenestration and disguises proved equally embarrassing for Honest Abe.

Lincoln’s journey was on the same PW&B rail line from Philadelphia to Washington along which he was to first authorize Gen. Winfield Scott to suspend habeas corpus, leading to U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger B. Taney’s order to reinstate it, which Lincoln ignored. No hue and cry went up from the Philadelphia Bar. In fact, one of its oldest and most legendary members and Lincoln man, Horace Binney, wrote in three pamphlets a spirited defense of Lincoln’s not-so-unprecedented act. (Andrew Jackson suspended it in New Orleans during the War of 1812).

1862 – SWITCHING TRAINS AGAIN  
– IN SECRET

Although not official visits (in fact, they were secret), Lincoln passed through Philadelphia briefly, twice in 1862 (June 23 and June 25) to change trains, as he had in 1860, on his way with Gen. John Pope to and from a secret rendezvous with retired Gen. Winfield Scott at West Point, N.Y. Though not quite at Acela speed, the President set a record for Washington to New York travel of 7 hours, 20 minutes.

1864 – THE U.S. SANITARY COMMISSION  
GREAT CENTRAL FAIR

Lincoln had shared the podium with him once before, seven months previously – at Gettysburg. There, on Nov. 19, 1863, Everett spoke first, for two hours, Lincoln second, for two minutes.

Although in the midst of a campaign for re-election, and one that he then fully expected to lose, Lincoln, the politician/statesman, consciously chose not to use this Philadelphia visit to make political speeches. At a banquet in the main assembly hall at the fair on June 16 at about 7 p.m., Lincoln gave a brief speech commending the fine work of this private, volunteer organization in giving comfort and relief to Union soldiers. Impressed with Philadelphia’s effort on his behalf, the president was overheard to whisper, in his inimitable folksy way, that this was “a right smart get out.”

Unlike Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, who detested the commission as being meddlesome in military affairs, Lincoln supported this organization that had helped to improve conditions in army camps considerably. Lincoln knew that more than twice as many Union soldiers were dying from disease than were being killed in action. More sanitary conditions amongst the fighting forces of the Union might ensure its survival. He had spoken previously at a similar Sanitary Commission Fair on April 18 in Baltimore, and had been persuaded by the commission to appoint the nation’s first surgeon general.

His fair speech was no Gettysburg Address and was more than twice as long, but he made three important and memorable points whose wisdom lingers to this day: That, “war, at the best, is terrible, and this war of ours, in its magnitude and in its duration, is one of the most terrible;” that the war would only end when the “worthy object” for which it had been “accepted,” “the line of restoring the national authority over the whole of the national domain” was “attained,” and “… we are going through on this line if it takes three more years.” Though suggesting that he was and the nation should be prepared to fight on for as long as it had already fought, the
crowd cheered wildly. Thankfully, yet still tragically, it took less than one more. And he would see it end, though live to savor victory and peace for less than a week.

As Lincoln spoke at the fair, the war dragged on. More than 100,000 men were then engaged in a fierce battle outside of Petersburg, Va. Grant and Meade’s Army of the Potomac was attacking Lee and Beauregard’s Army of Northern Virginia in a bloody battle that would start the 10-month siege of Petersburg. The war was far from over and Union victory was not yet certain. Less than a month later, Confederate troops under Gen. Jubal Early came to within five miles of the White House, the closest hostile troops had come since the British burned it in 1814.

There was some hope in the world, however. Two months later, 12 nations met to sign the First Geneva Convention that dealt with treatment of sick and wounded soldiers in war. Although engaged in the greatest military conflict on the planet, the U.S. did not attend, and took 20 more years to sign.

**MORE SPEECHES**

Lincoln made remarks four more times on the day and evening of June 16, 1864, in the city.

After his principal address, Lincoln made a few comments when accepting a silver medal from the ladies of the fair, as well as other gifts, including a cane made from an arch under which Washington had passed in Trenton on the way to his inaugural. Between the fair and his hotel, Lincoln stopped at The Union League just up the street from his hotel, and spoke briefly to a delegation inside and then to a crowd assembled outside. Lincoln said little of substance in these three talks, consciously eschewing politics but rather praising the efforts of the commission and the soldiers in the field.

Lincoln had arrived at the fair at 4:15 p.m. and did not return to his hotel until about midnight when, before retiring, he made a few brief remarks from the same balcony he had appeared on in 1861.

And he was gone the next day, never to return as President or living.

**1865 – IN STATE**

Lincoln left this world 140 miles from Logan Square, in the Petersen House, 516 10th St., NW, Washington, D.C., at 7:22 a.m. on April 15, 1865. His body returned to Philadelphia to lie in state in Independence Hall on April 22-24, 1865. More than 125,000 Philadelphians paid their respects and then he was gone. But Philadelphia will never forget Abraham Lincoln.

---

M. Kelly Tillery (tilleryk@pepperlaw.com) is a partner with Pepper Hamilton LLP.

---

**SEEING SPOTS**

I have earnestly attempted to locate the exact “spot” where President Lincoln stood when he gave his U.S. Sanitary Commission Great Central Fair address, but alas, to no avail. There is no bronze plaque, no historical marker, nothing. It may now actually be part of the roadway that encircles the Logan Square (or Circle, if you will) Fountain. There are, however, two plaques that mark locations where Lincoln spoke in Philadelphia, one in front of Independence Hall (Feb. 22, 1861) and one where he spoke the night before (Feb. 21, 1861) from the balcony of the Continental Hotel. The former, courtesy of “Post 2, Department of Pennsylvania, Grand Army of the Republic” is in the sidewalk on the exact “spot” where Lincoln stood when he spoke and raised the new 34-star flag, though he actually stood on a wooden platform about six feet above that “spot.” The latter, courtesy of the Lincoln Civil War Society of Philadelphia, the Civil War Centennial Commission and the City of Philadelphia, is on the Chestnut Street side of the former Benjamin Franklin Hotel, which replaced the Continental Hotel in 1925.

Sadly, the site of Lincoln’s other talk on his 1861 visit, the front steps of the first home of The Union League, the Hartman Kuhn Mansion, at 1118 Chestnut St., is unheralded. Unless a concrete and metal building housing a “Dollar Point” store counts.

The Pennsylvania Historical Museum Commission’s Historical Marker Program has erected more than 232 historical markers throughout the city. W.C. Fields and Wilt Chamberlain each have one. Abraham Lincoln should as well. He and the Fair Speech location have been nominated for a marker. The state, I am told, has no money in the budget for markers.

President Lincoln would be amused by my search for the “spot.” He had an odd fondness for “spots.” In his first bold move, as a freshman congressman in 1847, he introduced eight resolutions, later derisively called “The Spotty Resolutions,” demanding that President James K. Polk identify the “particular spot” on U.S. soil where Mexican soldiers had allegedly spilled American blood, the purported basis for Polk’s “pre-emptive war” on Mexico. Polk ignored the young, rustic Illinois lawyer’s demands and no one ever identified “the spot.”

President Lincoln revived his focus on “spots” in his Independence Hall remarks to Philadelphia’s Select Council when he said, perhaps presciently, that he “… would rather be assassinated on this spot than to surrender” this country if we had to give up the Declaration of Independence’s principle that “all should have an equal chance.” His reference to his own assassination may have been inspired by the warnings he had received the night before.

- M. Kelly Tillery
The right investment plan starts with the right investment partner. Coming together as a team with our clients and their advisers allows us to ensure that all of our combined efforts are focused on a common goal. RBC Wealth Management is rooted in the belief that true collaboration conducted with a high level of ethical behavior and sound business values always brings about the best results.

- Investment Analysis and Brokerage Services
- Retirement Planning and Solutions
- Estate Analysis and Strategies
- Professional Trust Services
- Education Savings Plans
- Credit, Mortgage, and Loan Services
- Life/Disability/Long-Term Care Insurance Analysis
- Corporate Executive and Business Owner Solutions
- Fixed Income Strategies
- One of the Nation’s Top Underwriters of Municipal Bonds

Earl Marks, CFP®, AWM
Senior Vice President - Private Client Group
Branch Director

3000 Atrium Way, Suite 500 • Mt. Laurel, NJ 08054
(856) 840-6646 • (866) 545-0329 • Fax: (856) 840-6658