



The Day Lincoln **Visited Newark**

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Why did President-Elect Abraham Lincoln even stop in Newark, especially since the city did not vote for him in 1860?

Who opposed Lincoln in Newark? Why? What did he do here on February 21, 1861, when he was in town for a total of 45 minutes?

And, ultimately, how did Newarkers receive him that day?

These are just a few of the issues I'd like to address tonight in the Newark History Society's "Lincoln and Newark" program.

It's all about the shoes. Shoes may well make the man, but in the case of Newark, it could be argued that shoes also made the city.

Starting in 1790, when Moses Combs, a Market Street shoemaker, sold 200 pairs of his leather shoes to a Savannah, Georgia gentleman, Newark was on its way to becoming a great manufacturing and industrial center. It also marked the beginning of a long and profitable trading partnership with the American South. By the 1820s, ships sailed back and forth from Newark to Charleston, South Carolina each week transporting people and durable goods. As Newark trading ships sailed into the Port of Charleston they were a stone's throw from Fort Sumter, where the first shots of the American Civil War were fired 150 years ago.

Throughout the antebellum period, Newark was a virtual "Southern workshop", providing nearly 65% of its products—from shoes and clothing, to saddles and carriages—to Southern markets. Our beloved Newark historian Charles Cummings once said that Newark made everything, from A-Z, asbestos to zippers, and most of it was shipped below the Mason-Dixon Line. That would all be jeopardized if Abraham Lincoln was elected as the first Republican president in the fall of 1860.

It was altogether ironic then, that a Newark-based shoe company, the famed Johnston & Murphy firm, made shoes for Abraham Lincoln, as they have for every president since 1850. As the tallest president in U.S. history at 6'4", Johnston & Murphy had to make the new president size 14 shoes.

Before the President-elect ever set foot in Newark, though, the city was alive with politicking, infighting, and intrigue. Most Newarkers were interested in matters of union and disunion, slavery and freedom, but they were more worried about their livelihoods. Local wisdom had it that if Lincoln won the election, Southern states would indeed secede from the Union, and as a result Newark's many businesses would suffer.

So as early as the summer of 1860, Newark's citizens tried to make sense of the various parties and their platforms. The summer before the election one newspaper tried to simplify the matter and carried an article under the following headline: "The Four Parties and How They Differ."

"The Lincoln party is in favor of voting slavery down in our Free Western territories; the Breckinridge party is in favor of voting it up; the Douglas party don't care whether it is voted up or down, and the Bell-Everett party 'don't know anything about nothing.'"

"In other words," the *Newark Daily Advertiser* went on to add, "the Lincolnites see a great advancing evil, and face it boldly to combat it; the Breckinridgites see it, and offer to give it welcome; the Douglasites see it, and propose to look on it with calm indifference; and the Bell-Everettites shut their eyes to it, so as not to see it at all."

Anti-Lincoln, anti-war sentiment in the *Newark Journal* warned of the severe economic effects that war could have on Newark: "Should Lincoln be elected, many of our largest factories will be compelled in self-defense to make still less work, and many mechanics and journeymen will be compelled to face the rigors of winter, and meet the terrible answer everywhere—no work! No work!" Finally, the *Journal's* editor asked: "Are you prepared to vote for that party which will be the instrument of taking the bread from the mouths of your wives and children?"

Newark, always a town for parades, bristled with excitement in the weeks before the November 7th election. Republican "Wide Awakes" and Democratic "Copperheads" both marched in partisan gatherings, and listened with rapt attention to local politicians stumping for their candidates.

On October 31, 1860, five thousand Lincoln supporters gathered at James Street, a block from where we are gathered tonight, before marching through the streets in a torch-lit procession. The following night, over five thousand anti-Republican marchers backed by bands and a drum corps snaked through the city's streets. Fireworks lit up the skies, and one commentator reported, "Republicanism was, it seemed, doomed to defeat."

Some people held signs aloft. One read: "For President, anybody but a Black Republican" Another: "Shall we peril the liberty of 27 million whites to make 4 million slaves worse off?"

Finally, a float passed by, and according to the moderate *Newark Daily Advertiser*, it depicted "a party of negroes and white girls in a boat steered by Horace Greeley, with

Lincoln at the prow. The girls sat on the negroes laps in vulgar embrace, and Uncle Sam prevented them from landing. The float bore the motto, ‘no negro equality.’”

The atmosphere on Election Day in Newark was electric, and there was isolated street fighting in the city’s Sixth Ward, where a strong police force had to guard the polls. Once the votes were counted, though, it was apparent that Abraham Lincoln suffered a heavy defeat in Newark. He carried only two out of twelve wards. New Jersey did not vote for Lincoln either, and she was the only Northern state not to do so. It helped foster a false sense that New Jersey was a disloyal state.

A pro-Lincoln newspaper wrote after the election: “We lament most sincerely that New Jersey cannot enjoy the honor of having contributed to the result. . . . Employers made no secret of inducing their numerous workmen to vote for the anti-Republican candidates, on pain of immediate dismissal in case of their defeat.” The city and state seemed “thoroughly frightened out of its wits by the mention of disunion by the South, and of a withdrawal of business from our manufactures.” Put another way, if the South seceded, who would buy Newark-made shoes?

A month and a half after the election, and a month before Lincoln would visit Newark, South Carolina left the Union. Six others followed the Palmetto State, and there was even some sentiment that New Jersey should secede, too. Many in Newark agreed, especially since its businesses suffered in the wake of Lincoln’s election. Yet after Lincoln won the election, New Jersey’s Governor Charles Olden invited the President-elect to speak in Trenton while on his way to his inauguration in Washington. Lincoln agreed to the Governor’s request, but added a postscript to the letter he sent Olden: “Please arrange no ceremonies that will waste time.”

A Newark delegation visited New York City’s Astor House on February 19th, two days before his visit, and urged him to spend some time, however short, in the state’s great metropolis. Lincoln listened to Judge Cleaver of Newark’s Common Council and agreed to visit before asking him to make arrangements with an assistant. There is no indication that Marcus Ward, a direct descendant of the first settlers of Newark and a future governor of New Jersey, was in the Newark party that waited on Lincoln that day. Yet he would’ve known Lincoln because Ward was a delegate to the Republican Convention in Chicago that nominated Lincoln for president. The photograph of Abraham Lincoln from this event’s flier, taken on May 20, 1860 in Springfield, Illinois, was taken at Ward’s request. During and after the Civil War, Ward would be widely admired for the medical and financial help he provided for New Jersey soldiers and their families. After the Newark delegation left the Astor Hotel, Lincoln penned a brief note to remind them of his wishes. It read: “I shall be able to do no more than bow to the people of New Ark from the train,” and it was signed “A. Lincoln”

The agreed upon route appeared in the morning's paper, and it indicated that Lincoln's party was to pass through the city from the Morris & Essex Station to the Chestnut Street Station, a mile and a half away, by way of Broad Street. Newarkers seemed proud to show off "our board and magnificent avenue that bears witness to the fruits of manufacturing skill and enterprise, and steady devotion to the principle of Free Labor." Hurried arrangements were made, and some of the extravagances of a military show, and full bands were passed over for want of time and to honor Mr. Lincoln's wishes. There was even talk about anti-Lincoln protests. *The New York Times* noted that "villainous posters" had been displayed in the city in the days before the president-elect's visit, and they called upon "the unemployed working men to attend at the depot upon Mr. LINCOLN'S arrival here, to demonstrate their differences with him."

After an early-morning ferry ride from Manhattan, the president-elect first set foot on Jersey soil in Jersey City. He gave a speech to the thousands gathered at the train depot before boarding his special train—the four-car *William Pennington*—and it started to snow as the train made its way across the Jersey meadows. Boys perched on telegraph poles and the roofs of buildings heralded the train's approach, and the weather did not impede Mr. Lincoln's tight schedule as the presidential train arrived on time, pulling into Newark's Morris & Essex Station, near the present Broad Street station, at half past nine in the morning.

Despite Lincoln's request that there be "no speeches, introductions or hand-shakings," Mayor Moses Bigelow welcomed him to the city, and said that Newark citizens "have ever been loyal to the Constitution and maintained the integrity of the Union, and entertain an ardent hope that your administration will be governed by that wisdom and by that discretion which which be the means of transmitting the confederated States as a unit to your successors." Mr. Lincoln listened attentively, and then spoke. He paraphrased the words he uttered ten days earlier when he left his hometown of Springfield, Illinois. "Mr. Mayor," he said, "I thank you for this kind reception to your city, and would say in response that my heart is sincerely devoted to the work you deserve I should do. With my own ability I cannot hope to succeed, but I trust to be sustained by Divine Providence, and this great, free, happy and intelligent people. Without this I cannot hope to succeed; with it; I cannot fail. I thank you again for this kind reception."

Lincoln bowed to the audience and then proceeded to fold his 6'4" frame into the waiting horse carriage. Hitched to the white carriage were four gray horses, and the president-elect was joined by the Mayor, Judge Cleaver and General Jonathan Dayton. Nineteen other carriages joined in the procession down Broad Street. Since the early morning the city's streets were almost impassable as Newarkers and Jerseyans from "a hundred little villages" jostled to get

a glimpse of “Honest Abe.” Spectators lined Broad Street; stuffed themselves onto balconies and terraces; and peered out of every available window. Some climbed trees to get a better look. “Encouraging shouts were heard, some of which Mr. Lincoln acknowledged, but his face was deep-set,” observed historian David Lawrence Pierson. “He was meditating, no doubt, upon the strenuous experiences in store for him in the nation’s awful drama.”

Mr. Lincoln first entered into conversation with the others in his carriage at Military Park, and he turned to Mayor Bigelow and commented on the park’s beautiful elm trees. He also commented on the enthusiasm along the widest street in all of America. According to an embedded *New York Times* reporter, “Very many private carriages stood along the line, all of which were filled with bright-eyed ladies, who smiled and waved with as much enthusiasm, if not with as much noise, as the ruder specimens of humanity who surged by them on foot. We have never seen a more extensive or prettier display of ‘lovely women,’ than was made on the main street of Newark during the passage of the procession. Mr. LINCOLN was struck by it, and thought if there are as many brave men as there are fair women in the city, Newark would be a difficult city to take.”

According to a Newark newspaper account, “It seemed as though the entire population of half the state had gone wild with enthusiasm and delight. The people ran, shouted, hurrahed, and waved hats and handkerchiefs to an astonishing degree. The roofs of stores, dwellings, factories and sheds were covered with nearly as many spectators as were in the streets.” Another observer said of the estimated 25,000 people packing the city, “men, women and children were temporarily insane.” Women scattered flowers and blew kisses as they stood up in their fancy carriages.

One child, nine-year-old Washington Cort, was the son of English parents, and he trailed behind the President-elect’s carriage, slipping and sliding in the snow. Washington’s father was one of the first Newarkers to join the newly formed Republican Party in 1856. He recalled years later: “Mr. Haynes [future mayor Joseph Haynes] dismissed the school so we could see ‘Old Abe’ Lincoln pass through Newark. I stood at Broad and Hill streets, in front of Sandford’s Hotel, and saw him go by and then followed his carriage to the Chestnut street station of the Pennsylvania Railroad, where he boarded a train for Washington for his inauguration as President. This was the most thrilling experience of my life.” When the war started, Washington left school and began working with his father. He made bayonet scabbards for the army as well as cap boxes, knapsacks, cartridge boxes, saddlebags, and other leather goods for the Cause.

Another child, F. E. Dennis, “remembered that day of lowering clouds and light snow falling when Honest Old Abe rode down Broad Street to get on his train for Washington. Several of us stood at Market and Broad Streets. As the barouche approached we made a

grand charge through the snow and slush to the side of the vehicle. When the driver slowed up and Abe put out his hand which we grabbed giving it a cordial shake. Even at this late day I see his benign look through a pair of eyes that spoke volumes. He was on his way to hear the dreadful burden of four years' bloody conflict."

"Old Abe" encountered the final group of children at the Ninth Ward Public School, just around the corner from the Chestnut Street Depot. They stood, smartly dressed on three platforms, and as he passed by, they sang "Hail, Columbia." The President-elect stood up, acknowledged them, and bowed three times. An Irish immigrant watched Lincoln as he passed by, and stated, "And sure, he's the plainest dressed man in the party." The people felt that in Mr. Lincoln, they had one of themselves, and helped him win the "public heart by his manly simplicity of his character."

The procession slowed just before South Park, the very park that would be renamed Lincoln Park in 1869, and made a left onto Chestnut Street. It grinded to a halt at the depot, where a huge crowd hemmed the presidential carriages in, and "a terrible struggle occurred." The Newark police kept the encroaching throng at bay. With the help of the police lieutenant Mr. Lincoln boarded the waiting train, and the rest of his party, "tired, fatigued, mussed, weary and flushed," from the efforts to board the train, "stretched their shaking limbs across the welcome cushions, and with muttered cursings at the outrageous treatment they had received." In the crush, one man was knocked senseless and suffered a broken collarbone. A young woman was run over by a wagon but did not appear to sustain much of an injury. From the back of the train, the President-elect thanked the enthusiastic turnout once again. At 10:35, to the strain of "The Star-Spangled Banner" Lincoln headed south to Trenton.

The Newark Daily Advertiser sought to compare the weather to the President-elect's political future, observing, "The weather, too, was suggestive of Mr. Lincoln's political progress. The day opened with a bright sunny sky, soon after obscured by frigid snow squalls, and finally terminating in a clear invigorating atmosphere."

Newark, and perhaps even the nation, seemed to be all four seasons in one day. ■

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