

Introduction to the Special Section in the February 2009 issue of the
"Connecticut Medicine" journal devoted to Abraham Lincoln and Civil War
Medicine in Honor of the Bicentennial Celebration of his Birth

Irving D. Moy

Shelby Foote, the imminent southern novelist who wrote the epic three-volume history of "The Civil War- A Narrative," believed that the Civil War created two authentic geniuses, the Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest and Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln, he said, possessed this unique ability *"to remove himself, as if he were looking at himself. It's a very strange, very eerie thing and highly intelligent. Such a simple thing to say, but Lincoln's been so smothered with stories of his compassion that people forget what a highly intelligent man he was."* As much as Lincoln himself said that he was controlled by events, *"almost everything he did was calculated for effect. He knew exactly how to do it."*¹

In late February 1860 personal reasons and political necessities combined to bring Abraham Lincoln east, where on February 27, 1860, he delivered a speech at the Cooper Union Hall in Brooklyn, NY. The eastern Republicans in attendance acclaimed Lincoln's speech although he, himself, thought that the speech *"went off passably well."* Lincoln was well aware that his Illinois friends were determined to place his name in nomination at May's Republican convention in Chicago. He, therefore, combined his New York appearance with a visit to his son, Robert, a student at Phillips Exeter Academy in Exeter, New Hampshire. He traveled through Connecticut, where Governor William Buckingham was engaged in a tight campaign for re-election. Winning the Nutmeg State was important to the Republicans' chances for winning the fall presidential election, so Lincoln took the opportunity to work for both his own interests as well as the interests of his party.

After spending February 29- March 4 with Robert, Lincoln left Boston on March 5 to catch the 3:00 p.m. train for a 7:20 p.m. arrival in Hartford. Arriving at the Old Train Station, located on the site of today's Union Station, he was greeted by an enthusiastic crowd that included the "Wide Awakes," a newly formed campaign organization of young Republican men. They were dressed as caped marchers and provided a torch lit procession into the city for their hero. Lincoln spent two whirlwind days in Hartford, speaking to a capacity crowd in the Old City Hall that was located on Market Street, and touring the city that included a visit to the Colt Armory. Lincoln also met Gideon Welles, the editor of the Hartford Evening Press, at the venerable bookstore, Brown and Gross Book Store on the corner of Main and Asylum streets. During his visit Lincoln stayed at the home of Mayor Timothy Allyn on 102 Asylum Street.

¹ Geoffrey C. Ward, Ric Burns and Ken Burns, *The Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), pg. 270

Lincoln then left Hartford on the afternoon of March 6th on the 3:05 p.m. train to New Haven, whereupon arriving 90 minutes later, he spoke for an hour and a half at Union Hall at the corner of Chapel Street, against the moral repugnancy of “popular sovereignty” and the selfish interests of slaveholders. An enthusiastic band escorted Lincoln to 92 Olive Street, the home of James Babcock, the publisher of the “New Haven Palladium, a leading Republican paper, where he spent the night.

Lincoln’s next stop on a cold and wet March 7th was in Meriden where over 3,000 people were reported to have filled Meriden’s Old Town Hall, on the site of today’s city hall. On March 8th he traveled to speak at Harris Hall in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, returning to Governor Buckingham’s hometown of Norwich, where that evening Lincoln spoke for two hours to another enthusiastic crowd at the Old Town Hall. Tired he spent the evening of March 9th at the Wauregan House, a stylish inn that still stands at Main and Broadway.

Leaving Norwich, Lincoln had one more Connecticut stop to make. On the morning of March 10th, he boarded the 6:00 a.m. train that took him through New London, New Haven and other connecting towns to a 10:30 a.m. arrival in Bridgeport. He rested and conferred with Charles F. Wood, a local businessman and Republican leader, at his home at 67 Washington Avenue. In the evening Lincoln delivered his last Connecticut speech at City Hall, now McLevy Hall on Board and State streets before he left on the 9:00 p.m. train for New York City where he headed back to Springfield, Illinois on March 12th. Only at the locations in Meriden and Bridgeport are there plaques to commemorate Lincoln’s little known visit to Connecticut.

How important was Connecticut to Lincoln’s candidacy and his presidency? Governor Buckingham was re-elected. Support for the Republican Party was strengthened throughout New England, where the region overwhelmingly voted for Lincoln in the general election. Governor William Buckingham would go on to become one of the great Civil War governors, who answered President Lincoln’s call for troops by raising 54,000 men more than one-tenth of Connecticut’s population of 461,000 to serve in volunteer regiments and fight for the cause of Union. Only Iowa and Illinois provided more troops in proportion to its population. Gideon Welles would serve as Secretary of the Navy in his cabinet. Fifty-two generals from Connecticut would lead armies, and Connecticut’s factories would supply the Union armies and navies with arms, munitions and accoutrements for its soldiers and sailors.²

In honor of Abraham Lincoln’s Bicentennial Celebration of his birth and of the importance of his visit to our state, the Connecticut State Medical Society has devoted a section of this month’s journal, “Connecticut Medicine” with articles by eminent physicians, who themselves

² W.A. Croffut and John M. Morris, *The Military and Civil War History of Connecticut During the War of 1861-65* (New York: Ledyard Bill Publisher, 1868), pg. 800

are living historians. These articles include Lincoln's medical history of possible Marfan's Disease, his "melancholia" and his possible survival from his head wound inflicted on the night of his assassination. Other articles cover the state of medical care during the years of that bloody conflict that resulted in the loss of 620,000 lives. The Battle of Antietam, the bloodiest single day battle in our Nation's history, resulted in over 26,000 casualties. The enormity of that single day is reflected in the fact that only 35 cities in this country at the time had as large a population. A greater tragedy, however, was that two out of three casualty deaths were due to illness and disease. The Civil War is considered to be America's first modern war, and the medical innovations in terms of care and treatment were an outgrowth of that conflict.

The Connecticut Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission is grateful for this important contribution by the society's membership in honoring America's greatest president. We will all benefit by continuing to study Lincoln's life and legacy that still holds great meaning to the collective good of this Nation, 143 years after his death.

Irving D. Moy, a Public Health Services Manager with the Connecticut Department of Public Health, is a member of the Connecticut Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission, and is President of the 14th Connecticut Volunteer Infantry, a non-profit educational and historical preservation organization.

Sources for Lincoln in Connecticut

Abraham Lincoln: Western Star over Connecticut, Nelson R. Burr, Lincoln Herald, Harrogate, TN, 1984

"Lincoln Stumps the State," Douglas Lavine, Hartford Courant, Section C, February 9, 1986

For readers wanting to learn more about Abraham Lincoln, the Civil War Era and his presidency, I recommend the following three Pulitzer Prize winning books that have remained both references and favorites of mine.

Battle Cry of Freedom- the Civil War Era, James M. McPherson, Oxford University Press, New York, 1988, written by the Dean of Civil War historians, is the standard text in understanding the economic, political and military aspects of the Civil War Era.

Lincoln, David Herbert Donald, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1995, remains the finest single volume biography written by the Dean of Lincoln scholars.

Team of Rivals, The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln, Doris Kearns Goodwin, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2005, the acclaimed historian covers Lincoln's political genius of bringing together his opponents to channel their unique talents to preserving the Union and winning the Civil War.