



# Lincoln's death mourned in Sandusky



*It took 24 different locomotives to carry President Abraham Lincoln to his final resting place in Springfield, Illinois. The trip took 15 days and covered 1,600 miles. The train did not travel through Sandusky; however, a number of Erie County residents traveled to Cleveland to view Lincoln's body on Public Square.*

Erie County was Lincoln country. The residents of Erie County, and Sandusky, voted for Abraham Lincoln for president in the 1860 and 1864 presidential elections by clear majorities.

In the Civil War era, Erie County was a blend of two cultures. The original settlers were primarily from New England and upstate New York, where there was a long tradition of anti-slavery sentiment. The Germans who settled in the county — especially in Sandusky — starting in the 1840s, were also anti-slavery.

Sandusky had a very active Underground Railroad.

As noted in other articles in this series, the main newspaper in the county, the Sandusky Register, reflected the views of a majority of its readers and was proudly and aggressively pro-Lincoln and pro-Union.

Lincoln was shot April 14, 1865, and died the next day; it was one of the most significant events of the 19th century.

Lincoln died at 7:22 a.m. on a Saturday morning. Within minutes after Secretary of War Edwin Stanton had uttered his famous “Now he belongs to the ages” statement, the telegraph wires were on fire across the nation, including in Sandusky.

That Saturday morning, Mayor Geiersdorf of Sandusky quickly issued a call for a citizens meeting at the courthouse at 2 p.m. for the purpose of “taking some public action relative to the death of President Lincoln” A committee of five citizens, including Sandusky's Oran Follett who was a founder of the Republican Party and publisher of the 1858 Lincoln-Douglas debates, drafted several resolutions.

They read, in part:

- “That in the death of President Lincoln, they (the residents of Erie County), in common with their fellow citizens of the whole United States, have met with an irreparable loss”
- “That while as citizens and accountable Christians, we eschew anything like revenge, we do demand Justice upon the heads of the guilty leaders of the present parricidal Rebellion; Justice and nothing short of Justice, will satisfy the people of this country

in dealing with the sins of Treason, Murder, and Arson engendered and encouraged by the Slave Oligarchy of the South.”

- “That we beg to tender to the family and friends of the President our heartfelt sympathy at the great loss, in common with the whole country, they have experienced.”

The crowd that gathered that afternoon in and around the courthouse was large and somber. Mourners overflowed the courtroom. The mayor called for businesses to close and churches and other buildings to be draped in black. The Register reported many people wept openly, from “gray bearded men” to “small children.”

The grief people felt was shared with outrage and a determination to punish his killers. A bloody war was ending. Hundreds of thousands were dead, including 130 Erie County soldiers.

On April 19, the day of Lincoln’s funeral in Washington, Erie County had special services starting at noon. Schools and businesses were closed. Churches in Sandusky and Erie County scheduled memorial services. On Johnson’s Island, 13 guns were fired at sunrise, then one gun every half-hour during the day and 32 at sunset. Residents were encouraged to “close their doors and repair to a place of public worship.”

The Lincoln funeral train left Washington, D.C., Friday, April 21. It did not traverse the same route Lincoln took when coming to Washington in 1861, but large portions did overlap. There had been nothing like it before in American history, and there has been nothing like it since. It is estimated a third of the U.S. population witnessed the passage of the train. In the 1860s, railroads were a loose system of individual lines; it took a major logistical effort and 24 different locomotives to carry the president to his final resting place in Springfield, Illinois. The trip took 15 days and covered 1,600 miles.

The train did not travel through Sandusky; however, a number of Erie County residents traveled to Cleveland to view Lincoln’s body on Public Square. The train left Cleveland on April 29 and headed to Columbus via Grafton, Wellington, Shelby and Crestline.

The crowds in the major cities were enormous, greater than anyone had anticipated. In Cleveland, more than 125,000 people streamed past Lincoln’s casket. In rural areas, people gathered and threw flowers at the passing train or stood quietly with heads bowed. Huge bonfires were lit as the train passed through small towns and villages. Groups of people stood and sang hymns as the train passed by. The average speed of the train was 20 mph.

The Mad River & NPS Museum in Bellevue has on display the bell that once rang on one of the funeral locomotives, announcing the arrival of Lincoln’s body.

The Rev. McCune, Post Chaplain of Johnson’s Island Confederate Prison, made a few remarks at one of the public gatherings in Sandusky:

“They have slain their best friend — the only man in whom they had any hope. Kindness of spirit has been the president’s ruling spirit” He added the prisoners on the island said, when told of the assassination, the deed could not have been done by any friend of theirs and their best hope was Lincoln.

True words.

*Preserving a Nation is written by John Hildebrandt, Erie County Civil War Sesquicentennial Committee.*