

When President Lincoln Came to Town

Part One of a Two-Part Series

By Bill Poray

Abraham Lincoln traveled by train to Fairport, or more accurately, through Fairport, twice in life, over a span of four years and two months. The first instance was the President-elect's journey from his home to Washington, DC, passing through Perinton on February 18, 1861. As he departed the depot in Springfield, Illinois, he addressed the assembled crowd before him: *"To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe everything... I now leave, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon [George] Washington."*



The "Old Nashville," just one of the engines that drew Lincoln's funeral train from Washington to Springfield, Illinois. *Image from the Library of Congress collection.*

Lincoln's second passage through this community occurred 153 years ago. Sadly, it was the President's funeral train that brought him. The train left Albany at 4:00 pm on April 26th, 1865 on route to Buffalo and ultimately, Springfield, Illinois. The slowly moving train was met with crowds of mourners at every crossing. Throngs of grief-stricken residents paid their respects in the towns and villages along the route, with endless American flags unfurled and torches illuminating the night.

New York Secretary of State Chauncey M. Depew (1834-1928) was aboard Lincoln's funeral train for the trip from Albany to Buffalo, and wrote of the experience in his book, My Memories of Eighty Years:

"It was late in the evening when we started, and the train was running all night through central and western New York. Its schedule was well known along the route. Wherever the highway crossed the railway track the whole population of the neighborhood was assembled on the highway and in the fields. Huge bonfires lighted up the scene. Pastors of the local churches of all denominations had united in leading their congregations for greeting and farewell for their beloved president. As we would reach a crossing there sometimes would be hundreds and at others thousands of men, women, and children on their knees, praying and singing hymns. This continuous service of prayer and song and supplication lasted over the three hundred miles between Albany and Buffalo, from midnight until dawn."

The funeral procession passed through Fairport shortly after 3:00 am. Despite the late hour, hundreds from the community witnessed the somber event. The crowd included young Herbert Howard, just five years old, and 14-year-old John Talman Jr. Such an event would likely find a place in the memory of anyone there, for the rest of their lives, and this was true of both Talman and Howard. The recollections of both men were published many years later in newspaper accounts, Talman's in 1925 and Howard's in 1935. Excerpts of each will appear in my next column.