



## Schuyler County Mourns Lincoln

by Gary Emerson


As the month of April began in 1865, Schuyler County looked forward to the arrival of spring, but that was overshadowed by the jubilation building over the impending end of the Civil War. The Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia had fallen, and General Lee's army had surrendered. Four years of bloody fighting appeared over, and the nation was braced to celebrate.

But celebration quickly turned to mourning when news arrived that President Lincoln had been assassinated on April 14<sup>th</sup> while attending a play at Ford's Theater in Washington, D. C. The newspapers in Havana and Watkins Glen expressed the grief that cast a gloom upon the county and the nation.

The *Havana Journal* noted that businesses closed the day of Lincoln's funeral in Washington. The paper expressed the feeling of the community when it wrote, "Never in our recollection, has there been so much gloom and sadness scattered abroad in our midst, as there was upon the receipt of the horrible news of the murder of our reverent President."

Havana citizens gathered in the Methodist church to hear Judge Ransom Balcom deliver a heartfelt eulogy honoring the martyred president. Another eulogy was given by Hull Fanton at the court house in Havana, and he was invited to repeat it at the Methodist Church in Catharine the following Sunday.

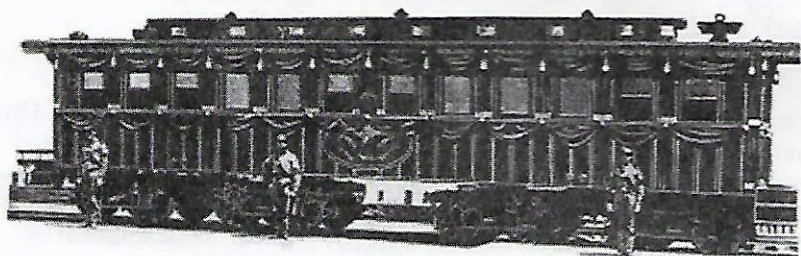
Anyone not sharing in the communal grief faced rough censorship. One woman, patronizing a store in Havana, made it clear that she was glad to hear of the President's fate. The store owner immediately opened the door and ordered her to leave the premises. In a similar case, a man in a Havana shoe store boldly expressed his view of the assassination by saying that "he was glad of it, and said Lincoln should have been assassinated four years ago." The shoemaker stopped his work, stood up, and demonstrated the quality of his leather footwear as he kicked the offender into the street.

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The *Watkins Express* also responded to the President's assassination when it wrote, "No words can express the deep anguish of the people. They stand dumb before the terrible calamity and the Nation is bowed down with inexpressible grief." The same newspaper carried an advertisement from an enterprising photographer who realized that the nation's grief could augment his pocketbook. The advertisement reminded readers that "Every lover of Liberty, should possess [sic] a likeness of Abraham Lincoln. The Gates Bro's in Shelton's block are now prepared to fill orders for Photographs, large or small, of the later President, as fast as day-light will permit them to make them."

In Watkins, all businesses were closed on April 19<sup>th</sup> and a ceremony honoring the dead president convened at the Methodist Church at 11 a. m. The crowd spilled out of the church to the street. Businesses and homes in the town were decorated in black crepe to signify their mourning. Students carrying a flag led the procession into the church to hear Reverend F. S. Howe deliver a eulogy in which he reminded the students that the slain president served as a good example for them to emulate— a man who rose above his poor background through hard work and self-learning.

After ceremonies in Washington, D.C., President Lincoln's body was prepared to be transported to his hometown of Springfield, Illinois. A special train would follow the path that Lincoln took when he first arrived in Washington to take the oath of office in 1861. The Schuyler County newspapers wrote about Lincoln's journey home.



*Lincoln's funeral car. It was the same one that brought him to Washington four years earlier for his inauguration.*



The Havana Journal wrote that "Mrs. Lincoln has consented to allow the remains of President Lincoln to be taken by the way of Philadelphia, New York, and Albany to his last resting place in Springfield, Illinois. The people all over the country are anxious to look upon the face of the man who has become so closely enshrined in their hearts, before it is consigned to its last resting place."

The Watkins Express also covered the funeral train's journey:

"The funeral cortege left Washington on the 21<sup>st</sup>. The corpse was shown at Baltimore, Philadelphia, and arrived at New York on Monday at 11 o'clock, a. m., and was open to the public twenty-five hours continuously. It will be seen at Albany, and other places on the route, and will arrive in Springfield on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May.

Thousands upon thousands press forward for a last look at all that remains of the great and good man; but many more thousands fail to obtain a view for the lack of time . . . Although twenty five consecutive hours were given at New York, it is estimated that not more than one-third of those who attempted to see the corpse were successful."

The following week, the Watkins Express reported that the funeral train had reached its destination and that "[t]he remains of the late President have reached their resting place, at Oak Ridge Cemetery, near Springfield, Ill. . . . no man, in this country, ever received such a tribute from the people; nor does the history of neighboring nations furnish a parallel."

As Schuyler County and other parts of the nation joyfully welcomed home the war weary troops, the nation mournfully laid to rest its most famous last casualty of the war.



*Editors note:* April 15 marks the 150th anniversary of the death of President Abraham Lincoln.