

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, January 19, 2009

**Presidential Inaugurations, 1861 and 2009:** Indeed it was a historic occasion when the special train carrying Barack Obama and his family from Philadelphia to Washington for his inauguration stopped in Wilmington on Saturday to pick up Delaware's vice president-elect Joe Biden and his wife. As our newspapers pointed out, this journey was symbolic of an earlier one in 1861, when Abraham Lincoln went by train from Philadelphia to Washington during the night of February 22–23, after the president-elect had spoken on the steps of Independence Hall on Washington's birthday.

President-elect Obama has always been a great admirer of Lincoln, also an Illinois man. In 2004, he initiated his campaign for the U.S. Senate at Knox College in Galesburg, where Lincoln debated Stephen A. Douglas in 1858. Lincoln climbed out a window of the small college building onto a platform erected for the debate and said, "Now I have been through college." Twice Obama spoke from the steps of the old Capitol building in Springfield, home turf for our 16<sup>th</sup> president, once to announce his bid for the nomination (in 2007) and once to begin his long and circuitous trek to Washington to become the 44<sup>th</sup> president of the United States.

January 20 has not always been inauguration day. Three times, Franklin D. Roosevelt was inaugurated on March 4, but his third term was shortened by six weeks when the official time was moved to January 20. March 4 had been chosen by our country's founders, as it was considered too difficult to travel in mid-winter, and the early March date was about as soon as it was practical after the previous November's elections. Thomas Jefferson, the first president to be inaugurated in Washington, left Monticello the previous November to make sure he would be there on time. This consideration was valid through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but in the 20<sup>th</sup>, it became awkward to have such a long lame-duck period between election day and the inauguration. A very ill F.D.R. took the oath for his fourth term in front of the White House on January 20, 1945, and that date has been official since, except when the 20<sup>th</sup> falls on a Sunday, when the inauguration is delayed by one day.

Lincoln left Springfield for the last time on February 11, 1861, and arrived in Washington about 5 A.M. on February 23. Threats against his life were prevalent, and Alan Pinkerton, founder of the nation's most well-known detective agency, was hired to guard his life. In Philadelphia, Pinkerton heard of a plot to assassinate the president-elect as he passed through Baltimore, a hotbed for southern sympathizers, so, instead of traveling a direct route through Wilmington on the Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore Railroad (later the Pennsylvania Railroad and now Amtrak), the president-elect was secretly moved through Harrisburg during the night. He passed through Baltimore (where it was necessary to change railroad stations) about 3 A.M. and checked in at the Willard Hotel before the capital was awake. About eight days later, he was sworn in by a slavery man, Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, whose infamous Dred Scott decision had increased tensions leading to the Civil War, which the incoming president was about to inherit.

Our new president's inheritance seems no less daunting than that of President Lincoln. We are hoping he can get Americans working together for the common good. He will need help from all of us. Let us celebrate tomorrow, January 20, 2009, as the beginning.