

**Address Given at St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral,  
Springfield, Illinois on Sunday May 3, 2015, at 9:15 a.m.  
by Richard E. Hart**

Thank you and good morning to all of you on this glorious day of commemoration. A day when we celebrate the life and legacy of Abraham Lincoln. A day prophesized by Springfield African American barber William Florville in a letter dated December 27, 1863, four days before the Emancipation Proclamation came into effect. Florville wrote to his attorney, barbering client and good friend President Lincoln. This is what Florville said:

*The Shackles have fallen, and Bondmen have become freeman to Some extent already under your Proclamation. And I hope ere long, it may be universal in all the Slave States. ... and for that reason, I hope and trust, that you may be chosen for a Second term to Administer the affairs of this Government.*

*And When these troubles Shall end, the Nation will rejoice. the Oppressed will Shout the name of their deliverer, and Generations to Come, will rise up and call you blessed.*

Today we fulfill Florville's prophecy. We are those "generations to come" and we are here today to rise up and call him blessed. But why do we do so?

To a large extent it is because of the events that occurred within a 90-day period in 1865. These events defined our destiny as individuals and as a nation. It did so for all of us here, as well as for all who went before us and all who will come after us in this Nation. Without them, we do not exist. They were and remain as important in our Nation's journey as the Declaration of Independence and the American Revolution.

The 90-day period began on January 31, and concluded with the burial of Abraham Lincoln in Springfield on May 4, 1865. It was a period like no other in the history of mankind. Here then are the events that occurred during that period.

On January 31, Congress passed the Thirteenth Amendment. The following day, Abraham Lincoln added his legally unnecessary but most important symbolic "Approved." Lincoln thus achieved the most important of his 1864 campaign objectives. Upon ratification by the States, the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment freed millions of humans held in bondage in the United States. It ended the national sin of slavery and fulfilled the previously unfulfilled promises and statements of beliefs set forth in the Declaration of Independence. *We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.* It was indeed the most significant Civil Rights legislation in the history of mankind.

On March 4, Lincoln delivered his Second Inaugural Address, an oration unequalled in the history of the Western World. It came from deep within Lincoln's soul. He confessed our collective national sin

of slavery and acknowledged that it had split us asunder. He promised to destroy that sin. Once confessed, he asked that we repent, reconcile and redeem our nation with humility, tolerance and forgiveness. He is our great teacher who by word and example taught us all the meaning of living together as a community of free and diverse humans. Today the Second Inaugural speaks not only to Americans, but to all of humanity.

On April 4, 1865, two days after Confederate forces evacuated Richmond, President Lincoln and his son Tad visited the still smoldering ruins of the South's former Capital. As Lincoln and Tad walked through Richmond, freed slaves in a real-time, Biblical-like scene gathered around him and called him "Father Abraham."

On April 9, 1865, Robert E. Lee surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant. The Civil War was coming to an end and jubilation swept the nation.

On April 11, 1865, Lincoln publicly called for the right of certain black men to vote.

On April 14, 1865, Lincoln was shot by a man opposed to Lincoln's April 11<sup>th</sup> pronouncement. Lincoln died the following morning and sorrow swept the nation.

On May 4, 1865, Lincoln was buried in Oak Ridge Cemetery in Springfield, the event we commemorate today.

In the 150 years since that date, literally thousands of books have examined the man—Abraham Lincoln. Who was he? Where did he come from? Where was he educated? Where did he develop such strength of character? How is it that his prose surpass all of those of highly educated speakers and writers? How would things have gone if he had lived to serve his second term as President? Isn't it amazing how Lincoln was transformed into such a great man **after** he arrived in Washington, D. C.? Did he have these elements before arriving in the nation's capital? How does the lesson of his life speak to us in our eternal struggle to make right the promises of the Declaration, the Emancipation, the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, and the Second Inaugural? How do we apply Lincoln's legacy to the civil rights issues that face us today?

And the historical analysis and speculation goes on, and on and on. Theories, postulations, revisions, and pure speculation gain and lose favor like the change of the seasons.

We will never know with absolute certainty the answers to these questions. We can only assemble verifiable facts and from those deduct what are likely or plausible answers, acknowledging always that we really do not know. But we should never stop our quest to understand the man.

I make three proposals:

1. We have an abundance of Civil Rights legislation on the books. We need no more at this point.
2. Lincoln's values and strength of character derived from his own life experiences before going to Washington. He possessed the values and strength of character to deal with the issues facing the nation when he stepped onto the train at the Great Western Station in Springfield.

3. In particular they derived from his life experiences in the verifiably diverse Springfield neighborhood where he lived with his family for 17 years.

We can visit that Springfield neighborhood today. It is just a few short blocks away. The experience of Lincoln's life there serves as a model for how diverse humans might live peacefully together. It was not perfect. Humans are not perfect. But from it came the man we all admire and who still defines our goals going forward as a nation.

Sadly, we have failed him. What he envisioned is the antithesis of much of what we see and experience in America today. From the overly greedy canyons of Wall Street to the elimination of our middle class and the alienation of those trapped in urban ghettos without jobs, we have failed him. We should examine his neighborhood and those who lived there. They are exemplars and a model that should be studied and imitated in present day America.

So let's take a journey back in time. Not a romantic nostalgia driven return to the past, but a realistic examination of the make up of the neighborhood where Lincoln lived. I invite you to imagine that we are walking in the Lincoln Home neighborhood in 1844. It is early spring, and the young Lincoln family has just moved into a modest cottage at the northeast corner of Eighth and Jackson streets. Built in 1839, the six-room, one-half story house was typical of hundreds of modest homes recently built and to be built in a booming Springfield during the next 10 years. It was located in a seven-year-old subdivision created by Elijah Iles at the southeast edge of town. It consisted of mostly empty lots, individually owned but not yet improved. It was new and without the structure of society often accumulated by older neighborhoods.

Between 1844 and 1860, the Lincolns experienced a peaceful and orderly transformation of their neighborhood. It became populated by people of a variety of races and ethnicities not present when the Lincolns first moved there. It literally became a melting pot of a variety of cultures and races. African Americans from the South, white families from the upland South and the Middle Atlantic and New England states, foreign born — Irish, English, Scottish, French, German and Portuguese — were either neighbors or worked as servants in homes within the neighborhood. A number of foreign languages were spoken in the neighborhood — German, French and Portuguese and a variety of English dialects — British, Irish, Scottish, African American, American Southern, and American Northern. There were a variety of religions and customs. The culinary spectrum must have been spectacular—a diverse stew of foods and smells. The residents were mostly young with many children. This little neighborhood was a microcosm of the larger diverse community of Springfield.

Who were these neighbors that 24/7/365 lived with Lincoln for 17 of the years of his life at 8<sup>th</sup> and Jackson. Perhaps James H. Matheny, Abraham Lincoln's friend and prominent Springfield resident, gave the best summation. This is what he wrote about the diversity of Lincoln's Springfield in an article he wrote for the *1857-58 Springfield City Directory*:

*The character of our population is extremely varied. We have representatives of almost every nationality beneath the sun; yet, varied as it may be, it meets and mingles in the struggles incident to existence, with perhaps as little discord as any people throughout the world. Every man in our midst who has evidenced a reasonable industry, coupled with care and prudence, has a home of his own,*

*humble though it be, yet, nevertheless, it is a "home" - and what costly palace is more than that.*

That is the big picture. Now let us explore the evidence that leads one to conclude that it was a diverse community of tolerance and acceptance.

**Education.** Education of one's children is at the top of every parent's list of priorities. In the fall of 1850 Abraham and Mary Lincoln sent their oldest son Robert to a school taught by Abel W. Estabrook, an abolitionist. Robert attended for three years. Estabrook had migrated with his parents and a group of New Englanders to Sangamon County in 1834 where they founded a settlement near Bradforton. They hated slavery and were committed to abolish it from the American soil. Abel signed the first call for an Anti-Slavery convention in 1837, a sure confession of his abolitionist preferences. In 1855-56, Estabrook lived four doors north of the Lincoln home. Selection of Estabrook to educate Robert evidences a tolerance of the Lincoln's for views not necessarily theirs.

**Proximity.** Those living in the neighborhood could easily walk from their home to work and shops. The distances were short. You could easily walk to town, and as Lincoln and others passed you on the street and in the market, they looked you in the eye and said "Hello." These were real humans. It was not like someone driving in the lane next to you today with tinted glass windows that prevents any eye contact. You cannot see one another. But in Lincoln's day, you could not avoid one another. You could not escape or ignore the person in the next lane even if you wanted to do so. They lived next door or down the street from you and they looked you in the eye. They were your neighbors.

**Population.** In 1850, Springfield had a population of about 5,000. 816 were first generation foreign born -- 255 Irish and 204 German.

Between 1850 and 1860, Springfield's population almost doubled to 9,320. Its first generation-foreign born population exploded from 816 to 3,140, an increase of 2,324. Those 3,140 residents were 1/3 of the total Springfield population and were born in 24 countries outside of the United States. The Irish born population increased by 1,011, and the German born population increased by 855.

The Lincoln home neighborhood shared this rapid influx of foreign born and adapted to the diversity of these new Americans and their Old World cultures.

Within a three-block radius of the Lincoln home, 127 foreign born lived or worked.

The Irish.

There were at least 60 Irish born in the neighborhood. The Lincolns had at least three Irish servants living in their home over the years, Catherine Gordon, Mary Fagan, and Mary Johnson.

The Germans.

There were at least 45 German born in the neighborhood. One of those German families was headed by John Bressmer who was born on June 8, 1833, in Wurttemberg, Germany. He came to Springfield July 1848, and his first wages were earned in grading the street in front of the residence of Abraham Lincoln. He often watched Lincoln go to and from his home and said that he learned to love the

man even before he was able to converse with him, for at that time Bressmer could speak nothing but the German language.

### The Portuguese

There were at least three persons from Springfield's Portuguese born community of 26. Who worked in the neighborhood as servants. The Lincolns had at least two Portuguese servants living in their home over the years. Frances Affonsa DeFreitas was a live-in domestic from November 1849 to February 1861. Charlotte Rodruiguís DeSouza

In 1860, Springfield's population included 318 persons born in England/Scotland, constituting 5.9% of Springfield's total population. At least nineteen of the 328 English/Scottish born lived within a three-block radius of the Lincoln home.

### The African Americans

By early twenty-first-century standards, the Lincoln family lived in an integrated neighborhood. In 1860, there were 290 African Americans living in Springfield and at least 21, about 10% of Springfield's African American population, lived within a three-block radius of the Lincoln home.

Over the years, the Lincolns employed a number of African Americans. Some worked in the Lincoln home, females as servants, men to work with the animals and to do heavier work. Some were Lincoln neighbors, one cut Mr. Lincoln's hair and one made his shoes and another made his shirts and underwear. Lincoln knew that a few African Americans were conductors on the Underground Railroad. He also knew that in early August of each year many African Americans paraded through the streets of Springfield and then gathered at what is now Douglas Park to celebrate the freeing of the Haitian slaves in 1804. He acted as attorney for some and knew the most intimate details of their lives. He passed them on the street and at the market and looked them in the eye and said "Hello." No doubt they had much to do with his personal attitudes about slavery and individual freedom and independence. They were his neighbors.

At least 20 African Americans, lived in four families within three blocks of Mary and Abraham Lincoln's home — the Jameson Jenkins family, the James Blanks family, the John Jackson family and the David King family.

The other two African American families the Jameson Jenkins family and the James Blanks family, lived in the block south of the Lincoln home.

The presence of the Jenkins and Blanks families as close neighbors of Abraham Lincoln gives us a sharp personal glimpse into Springfield and Abraham Lincoln that might otherwise be abstract and remote. The story of the lives of these two families are the best examples of the diverse and interesting African Americans who knew and lived near Abraham Lincoln. In 1850, the Jenkins and Blanks families were living at the same location, 1/2 block south of the Lincoln home.

Jameson Jenkins, a mulatto born in North Carolina, was one of the few brave souls in Lincoln's Springfield who took enormous personal risks to help runaway slaves move north from Springfield on the Underground Railroad. Lincoln knew him to be an Underground Railroad conductor.

On the evening of January 16, 1850, Jamieson Jenkins assisted seven runaway slaves move 60 miles north along the Underground Railroad from Springfield to Bloomington. called the events that transpired a “slave stampede.”

On February 11, 1861, Jamieson Jenkins drove President-elect Abraham Lincoln on his last Springfield carriage ride from the Chenery House at the northeast corner of Fourth and Washington Streets to the Great Western Railroad depot to begin his trip to Washington

Jane Pellow, a neighbor and friend of Abraham Lincoln and his family, was fondly known as “Aunt Pellow” or “Aunt Jane” or “Aunty Pellow.” In 1860, Jane Pellow was a 75 year-old mulatto. washerwoman

I have heard a story, perhaps apocryphal, that a family living on Second Street were in their parlor one evening when they heard very loud conversation in front of their house. The Lady of the house opened the front door and went out on the porch where she could see Abraham Lincoln and Aunt Jane Pellow walking down the street together in very loud conversation. She came back inside and told her family what she saw and added, “Why of course it makes sense that they would talk so loudly. Aunt Jane is almost deaf!”

James Blanks, a 38-year-old laborer, and his wife, Martha Ann, who was 35 years old. Both were listed as mulattos who were born in Virginia.

On October 13, 1842, James and Martha Ann Pellow Blanks purchased lots at the southwest corner of Ninth and Jackson Streets in Springfield, Illinois. The lots were part of a subdivision that Elijah Iles had created in 1837 and they were probably still vacant lots. Two years later when Abraham Lincoln purchased his home at Eighth and Jackson, it is most probable that he would have known that James and Martha were the African American owners of these lots as they were caddy corner from his house.

On June 14, 1850, eight Springfield African American men, the Trustees of the “Colored School,” signed a *Journal* newspaper announcement of a public supper to raise money for the “Colored School.”

Four African-American women — “Aunt” Ruth Stanton, Maria Vance, Hepsy Smith and Jane Pellow — worked in the Lincoln home.

Maria Vance, “Aunt Mariah” as she was called by the Lincolns, was an African American woman who served as cook, laundress, maid and later as a general helpmate for the Lincolns from 1850 to 1860. She was called “Aunt Maria.”

Maria moved to Danville, Illinois after the Lincolns left Springfield. In 18\_\_\_, Robert Lincoln who was President of the Pullman Railroad, travelled from Chicago to Danville to speak to a large gathering of Republicans. He was met at the train by local leaders and quickly excused himself and made his way to the two room cottage of Maria Vance. There they exchanged stories of the days in Springfield and made arrangements for Robert to come back for supper. When it can time for Robert to speak to the Republican rally, he was nowhere to be found. Someone remembered that he had said something about Aunt Maria Vance. Someone quickly went to Maria’s house and brought Robert to the rally. He spoke and thanked all for coming. He then returned to Maria’s home and enjoyed the supper that she had prepared for him. It consisted of all of his favorite foods as a young man that had been cooked for him by Maria. Robert returned to Chicago, and on the following work day he called in the Treasurer of the Pullman Company and

instructed him to send a pension check to Maria Vance every month thereafter. He had not forgotten the importance of Maria in the Lincoln household and made her the only Lincoln maid on the pension rolls of the Pullman Railroad.

Abraham and Mary Lincoln employed a number of hired men over the almost two decades at their Springfield residence.

African American Henry Brown was born in Raleigh, North Carolina. Henry was of immense physical stature, standing six feet three inches and weighing 250 pounds. He served in various capacities until he went to Washington as President. When Lincoln's body was brought back to Springfield in May 1865, Rev. Henry Brown was sent a telegram requesting that he come from Quincy to Springfield for the Lincoln funeral. He and another local minister, Rev. W. C. Trevan, led Lincoln's old family horse "Bob" in the funeral procession.

In both Quincy and Springfield, Brown helped runaway slaves move north on the Underground Railroad. On one occasion, he reportedly gave his own coat and vest to a poor black man. Lincoln did not know that Rev. Brown would lead his horse in his final journey to Oak Ridge Cemetery, but he had to know that his friend Brown was also among those brave souls — African American conductors on the Underground Railroad at Springfield.

I believe that this proximity and daily encounters created a deep sense of community and common purpose among the people of the Lincoln neighborhood and of Springfield. No doubt they had much to do with his personal attitudes about slavery and individual freedom and independence and tolerance of a variety of different cultures. His experiences and knowledge of Springfield African Americans was substantial and unfettered unlike his 4 ½ year old relationships with African American servants in the highly structured White House where Lincoln's contact with African Americans would have been of less duration, depth and intimacy.

It was natural that he returned to Springfield for burial. He came home to be buried where he had resided for 24 years before leaving on February 11, 1861. He came home to his neighbors and the only place where he had lived in a neighborhood or community.

He has left us with the legacy of the 90 days in 1865. He has left us with a model of how one should conduct one's life and relationships. Of how to be civil, tolerant, accepting, and compassionate — a model of how to live together. It is that model that we should teach in every school. Thank you Father Abraham.

As William Florville said 152 years ago:

Future generations will Rise up and call him blessed.

Thank you.