

## UPDATES...

The Oral History program continues to be a core project for the House Archives. The interviews conducted with former Members are accessible to the public upon request, and each interview is recorded on audio cassette, videotape, and DVD. Photographs of most of the interviews and typed transcripts are also available in the collections. Ninety interviews have been conducted, and more are scheduled. For a complete list of interviews, visit the House Archives web site: [www.house.state.pa.us/BMC/archives](http://www.house.state.pa.us/BMC/archives).

The House Archives hosts undergraduate college interns during the spring, summer, and fall semesters. Students attending colleges and universities across the Commonwealth, as well as Pennsylvania residents attending an out-of-state school, can learn the ins and outs of archival procedures, as well as obtaining a better understanding of the day-to-day operations of the House of Representatives. The interns earn college credit for their work and walk away with a greater knowledge of Pennsylvania's state government. More information about the internship program can be found on the website: [www.house.state.pa.us/BMC/archives](http://www.house.state.pa.us/BMC/archives).

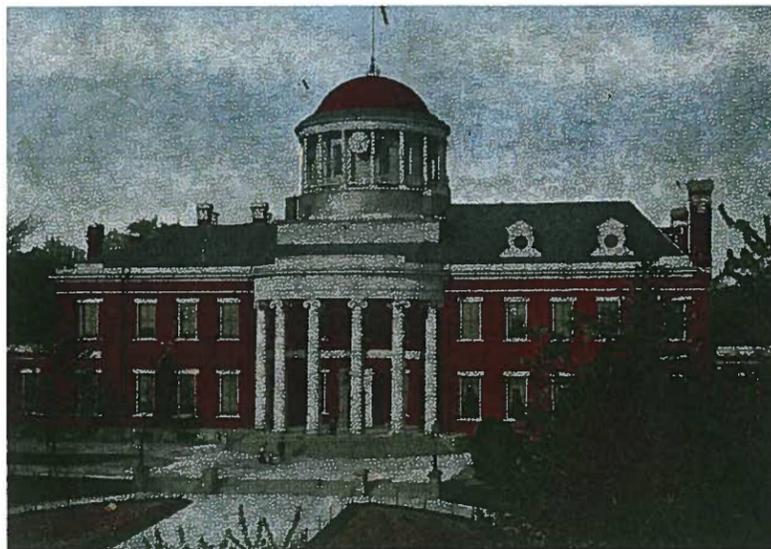
## DID YOU KNOW?

### Harrisburg was not the first site of Pennsylvania's state capital.

The first meeting place of the Pennsylvania General Assembly was Chester, Pennsylvania, originally a Swedish settlement named Upland. William Penn, founder and namesake of Pennsylvania, called a meeting in October of 1682, open to any free man (thus the term "General Assembly") for discussion on proposed laws. Governor Penn acted as Speaker and allowed the attendants to either agree or disagree on his proposed measures.

In the next year, Penn changed the General Assembly's meeting place to Philadelphia, and he decided the Provincial Assembly should henceforth be elected. In Philadelphia, the General Assembly had no formal meeting place nor did it have specific meeting times. It responded to Penn's summons or those of his colonial manager and tended to meet either in private homes or in Quaker meeting houses. After a nomadic existence of 47 years, the General Assembly decided it needed a permanent meeting place and set aside funds to build one. In 1735 they used the building, known as the State House, for the first time.

The State House worked well for many years, but by the 1790s with both the State and National Assemblies meeting there, the area was too cramped. Also, the heat, diseases borne by close contact with other people, the fear that city politics would dominate state government, and the fact that the population center of the state was moving to the west were all considerations that led the General Assembly to finally agree on moving. John Harris owned land on the Susquehanna River and offered four acres to the State for the site of government to entice them to come to Louisburg, as it was then called. The State Assembly moved to Lancaster, though it maintained control of the State House, and deliberated which Pennsylvania city they should make the new capital. The capital of Pennsylvania remained Lancaster from 1799 to 1812 before it moved to Harrisburg. The General Assembly then sold the State House to the city of Philadelphia to pay for the construction of the new State Capitol Building in Harrisburg.



Photograph courtesy of Capitol Preservation Committee.

PA House of Representatives

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# Archives

## PIECING IT TOGETHER

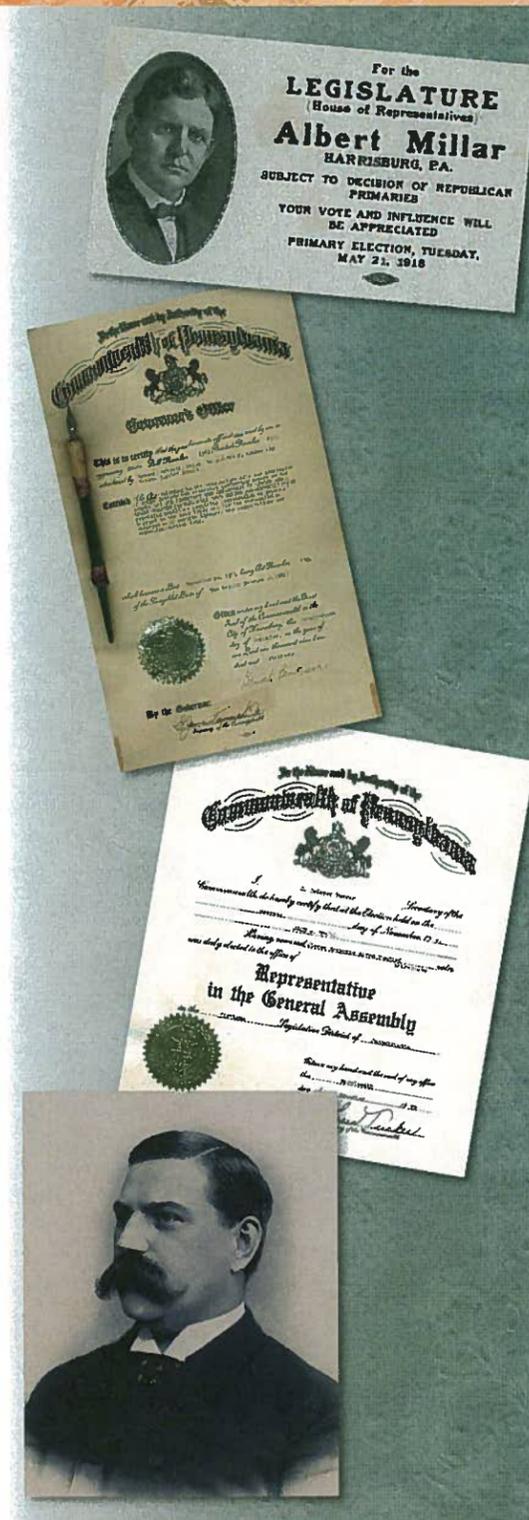
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## THE HOUSE *Archives* HAS MOVED!

The Archives of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives recently moved to its new location on the Fourth Floor of the historic Forum Building in Harrisburg. Utilizing over twenty rooms and gaining much-needed additional office and storage space, the House Archives has been able to increase its collections and house them in a more appropriate environment. As the official repository of the Pennsylvania House, the Archives is home to a number of different collections, including Committee Records from 1959 to 2008, Personal Papers of over forty former Members of the House, and Institutional Records of select agencies of the House. The various collections are made up of all types of media: paper files, books, photographs, videotapes, DVDs, CD-ROMs, audio cassettes, framed photos and certificates, oversized materials like campaign posters and architectural drawings, and even three-dimensional artifacts.

Also, the House Archives now has a reading room in which its library collections are held. Visitors to the Archives are able to conduct research in a comfortable setting amid works related to the history of the General Assembly. House and Senate Journals, House and Senate Histories, Pennsylvania Manuals, Laws of Pennsylvania, directories, and other books about the House and its Members line the stacks of the Reading Room and Library.

The newly updated website for the House Archives is now available. History, collection holdings, images, internship information, and newsletters are just a few of the items found on the pages. Visit the website at [www.house.state.pa.us/BMC/archives](http://www.house.state.pa.us/BMC/archives).





# The Plan that Saved the Union: How Abraham Lincoln Escaped His First Assassination Attempt

Five days after the surrender of Confederate forces and the formal conclusion of the Civil War, the fatal shooting of President Abraham Lincoln on April 14, 1865, sent a shock wave across America. However, even before Lincoln's first inauguration, the future head of state was targeted for death because he opposed slavery and advocated preservation of the United States as one country. Lincoln's escape from this initial attempt on his life was discovered and circumvented during a visit to the Pennsylvania Capitol in Harrisburg.

Despite advice to the contrary, Abraham Lincoln chose a circuitous route to Washington from his home in Springfield, Illinois, both as an opportunity for the public to see him and to gauge their acceptance of his administration.<sup>1</sup> In the few months since the presidential election, the face of America had changed. The breaking news at that time was the secession of the state of Texas,<sup>2</sup> which brought the total number of states joining the South to seven.

Early that February, Samuel Felton of the Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore Railroad had employed the services of Detective Allan Pinkerton to investigate claims that Confederate agents planned to burn railroad bridges in order to isolate Maryland from the North. Pinkerton's agents in Baltimore had gained the confidences of a group of conspirators there and became aware of a more immediate threat: Lincoln's passage through Baltimore would be met with an attempt on his life.<sup>3</sup> Details of the plot to murder the President-elect reached Lincoln's party while they were still in Philadelphia, on the evening of February 21, 1861, when Allan Pinkerton and Frederick Seward, son of Senator Seward, rode to Philadelphia bringing classified information concerning the investigation. Lincoln met with them separately in his room at the Continental Hotel, where they briefed him on the impending danger.<sup>4</sup> However, Lincoln was resolute to honor the occasion of Washington's Birthday and then to proceed to Harrisburg to be received by the State Legislature at the Capitol. A newspaper report of the time quoted Lincoln as saying: "Both of these engagements I will keep, if it costs me my life."<sup>5</sup>

Before Lincoln's arrival in Harrisburg, members of the National Guard held a formal procession to the Capitol Building, during which there was a 34-gun salute. Harrisburg was a much smaller city than Philadelphia, but reports estimate that the military's presence alone was no less than two thousand.<sup>6</sup> That afternoon Governor Andrew Curtin welcomed the President-elect on the balcony of the Jones House and spoke of the grave task Lincoln faced in maintaining the Union of States, stating, "You are called to the discharge of official duties at a period of time when the public mind is distracted and divided, when animosities and distractions divide the people of this hitherto happy and prosperous country. You undertake, sir, no easy task. You must restore fraternal feeling. You must heal up discord. You must produce amity in place

of hostility and restore prosperity, peace and concord to this unhappy country. And future generations will rise up and call you blessed."<sup>7</sup> Lincoln responded by saying, "I am quite sure I do not deceive myself when I tell you I bring to the work an honest heart; I dare not tell you I bring a head sufficient for it. If my own strength should fail, I shall at least fall back upon these masses, who I think, under any circumstance will not fail."<sup>8</sup>

Only an hour after his arrival, Lincoln was accompanied by members of the Senate, House, and military to the Hall of the House where he was greeted with addresses from Robert M. Palmer, Speaker of the Senate, and Elisha W. Davis, Speaker of the House; both expressing patriotism, duty, and resolve to honor the Union.

Following his appearance before the Pennsylvania Legislature, Lincoln retired to his hotel, the Jones House. Staying with him were a number of his close advisers. Caution prevailed, and it was decided that Mr. Lincoln would depart Harrisburg that night instead of the next morning as planned. Lincoln was secreted away from the Jones House, accompanied by the heavily armed Colonel Ward Lamon.<sup>9</sup> According to J. Howard Wert, Lincoln and Lamon, using a passage in the adjoining Hummel residence, boarded a carriage and proceeded to a locomotive and lone passenger car waiting at a section of track some distance east of city limits. Once on their way, telegraph lines into and out of the city were disconnected until daybreak, at which point a reconnected line delivered the message: "Plums delivered nuts safely."<sup>10</sup> Lincoln had arrived in Washington. Back in Harrisburg, the train scheduled to transport the President-elect left Harrisburg and, on arrival in Baltimore, was received by a large welcoming from a crowd that quickly became disappointed. Just after the train's arrival, the local press caught word that Lincoln was already in Washington, D.C., having escaped "an attempt...to throw the train from the track somewhere near the Maryland line."<sup>11</sup>

The finer details of Lincoln's escape have become a point of significant speculation. At least three Pennsylvania newspapers claimed that the President-elect departed from Harrisburg in disguise. Others tried to explain the success of keeping Lincoln's plan confidential, stating that telegraph operations along the original train route had been shut down between the evening of February 22 and the morning of the 23rd in order to guarantee his safety. In the central Pennsylvania newspaper, *The Huntingdon Globe*, one author described how government investigators discovered the plot in Baltimore. This same article explained that the conspirators had obtained explosives and had a vessel stationed in the city's harbor to help them escape.<sup>12</sup>

While it is unfortunate that the absolute certainty of these details has been forever lost with time, the ambiguity and array of the reports of this escape reflect the chaotic and frightening times the nation faced in 1861.



Market Square in 1860, Harrisburg, Pa.

With special thanks to Dr. Michael Barton and Rebecca Jean Hershner for their research and for supplying the J. Howard Wert articles housed at the Adams County Historical Society.

<sup>1</sup> Hershner, Rebecca Jean. "Such a Day & Time as Harrisburg Has Never Before Witnessed." Charles Rawn Records Abraham Lincoln's Visits to Harrisburg. The Historical Society of Dauphin County. [http://www.rawnjournals.com/papers/abraham\\_lincolns\\_visit\\_to\\_harrisburg](http://www.rawnjournals.com/papers/abraham_lincolns_visit_to_harrisburg)

<sup>2</sup> "The Secession of Texas." *The Press* [Philadelphia], February 7, 1861.

<sup>3</sup> Tidwell, William A., James O. Hall, David Winfred Gaddy. "Come Retribution: The Confederate Secret Service and the Assassination of Lincoln." Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1988. Pgs. 228-230.

<sup>4</sup> Bradley R. Hoch. "Looking for Lincoln's Philadelphia." *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 25:2 (2004), 64.

<sup>5</sup> "The Conspiracy to Assassinate President Lincoln." *The Huntingdon Globe*, April 24, 1861. <http://www.digitalnewspapers.libraries.psu.edu>.

<sup>6</sup> "Washington's Birthday in Harrisburg." *Lancaster Intelligencer*, February 26, 1861.

<sup>7</sup> "Great Day in Harrisburg!" *The Huntingdon Globe*, February 27, 1861. <http://www.digitalnewspapers.libraries.psu.edu>.

<sup>8</sup> "Great Day in Harrisburg!" *The Huntingdon Globe*, February 27, 1861. <http://www.digitalnewspapers.libraries.psu.edu>.

<sup>9</sup> Wert, J. Howard. "Lincoln in Harrisburg, Part I. Conclusion." *The Patriot*, February 5, 1909.

<sup>10</sup> Wert, J. Howard. "Lincoln in Harrisburg, Part I. Conclusion." *The Patriot*, February 5, 1909.

<sup>11</sup> "The Cause of the President's Leaving." *The Press* [Philadelphia], February 25, 1861.

<sup>12</sup> "The Conspiracy to Assassinate President Lincoln." *The Huntingdon Globe* [Huntingdon, PA], April 24, 1861.