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A little more than four years later, Lincoln would again grace the Halls of the House. This time, however, it was the President’s coffin that was brought to the House chamber after his assassination on April 15, 1865. The body of the fallen leader was transported via train from Washington, DC, to his final resting place in Springfield, Illinois. The route – reminiscent of his inaugural journey to Washington, DC – traveled through seven states and let the bereft pay their final respects at stops along the way. The train arrived in Harrisburg on the evening of April 21, 1865, in the
midst of a pouring rain. Lincoln’s body was taken into the Halls of the House and placed on a catafalque—a wooden frame that was built to support and display the coffin—where his remains laid in state overnight. Mourners formed a procession and from 9:30 p.m. until midnight, and again from 8 to 9:30 the next morning, thousands paid their final respects. Lincoln’s coffin was then returned to the train to move on to its next stop in Philadelphia.

These two dates mark not only pivotal moments in the Pennsylvania House’s history, but also in the history of the nation. The House has the unique honor to have both celebrated Lincoln’s ascension to the nation’s highest office and grieved his tragic death within its walls.

Lincoln’s catafalque in the House chamber of the Hills Capitol Building. The Hills Capitol Building, which was operational during both Lincoln’s inaugural stop and his funeral procession, was destroyed by a fire in 1897. Photo courtesy of Pennsylvania State Archives.

Abraham Lincoln and the Pennsylvania House of Representatives
(continued from page 1)

The esteemed Frenchman, Marquis de Lafayette, was born into a wealthy and influential family in France, but is best known in America for his service to the Colonial Army during the American Revolution, when he served as a top officer to General George Washington in 1777.

Lafayette traveled back to France in 1778 and successfully lobbied the Court of King Louis XVI to enter into an alliance with the Colonies, turning the tide of the Revolution in the Colonies’ favor. He served the cause of the American Revolution with such distinction that he gained notoriety as “the hero of two worlds.”

In celebration of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the United States, President James Monroe invited Lafayette to tour the United States in 1824. Lafayette accepted President Monroe’s invitation, and in his 1824 through 1825 trip he traveled over 6,000 miles to visit every state in the Union. Everywhere Lafayette visited he was greeted by adoring citizens and received celebratory gifts and honors. He visited state halls, attended town meetings, and met with dignitaries and elected officials—oftentimes addressing these gatherings by offering his thanks for their hospitality.

Lafayette accepted an invitation to address the Pennsylvania General Assembly on Tuesday, February 1, 1825. Lafayette was honored by the House to sit in the chair occupied by John Hancock during the Continental Congress. The General Assembly convened in session for the purpose of hearing Lafayette’s address. In his address, Lafayette called the Pennsylvania men he fought alongside during the war his “revolutionary companions and beloved brother soldiers, the sons of many of whom I have the pleasure to find on the floor of this Capitol.”

On November 13, 2001, the House conducted a Veterans Day Ceremony at which Philadelphia native William “Wild Bill” Guarnere was honored. Guarnere’s military service as part of the Easy Company, 2nd Battalion, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, in the 101st Airborne Division was dramatized in the HBO miniseries Band of Brothers. In Guarnere’s brief words he said, “When you look at me, see your brother, your uncle, your father, your grandfather. I represent every man that fought in World War II…”

On March 27, 2012, Kathy Sledge, lead vocalist for Sister Sledge, was recognized by the House for her philanthropic efforts to improve the lives of children in the Commonwealth. Sledge performed the hit song “We Are Family” for the House and is pictured here with former Speaker Sam Smith and former Representative Ron Waters.

On November 8, 2004, two-time Pulitzer Prize winning author David McCullough spoke as part of the Speaker’s Millennium Lecture Series. McCullough, a Pittsburgh native, is well known for his popular historical works, including The Johnstown Flood, Truman, John Adams, and 1776.

David McCullough pictured with former Speaker John M. Perzel and former chair of the Pennsylvania Humanities Council, Michael A. Tomor.
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The Marquis de Lafayette’s Address to the Assembly

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Famous Faces Visit the House

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