

SOUTHERN CALLS

# PRESIDENTIAL PASSINGS

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PART SEVEN OF OUR 8-PART SERIES

## A LOOK BACK AT THE 'LINCOLN SPECIAL' FUNERAL TRAIN

### *Thirteen Days to Springfield*

On Saturday morning, April 15, 1865, news of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the United States, was quickly transmitted to every telegraph office around the country. Our nation's citizens were in disbelief as the shocking news reached their cities and villages. Newspapers ran stories of the tragic event, newspaper boys yelled out the sad news and word-of-mouth spread rapidly. Church bells tolled as large groups of people gathered in the streets, tears running from their eyes and down their cheeks.

Within an hour of his death, the president was placed in a temporary coffin at the Petersen House, located across the street from Ford's Theatre, where he was shot, and returned to the White House. Undertaker Frank T. Sands with Brown & Alexander Undertakers of Washington and embalmer Dr. Charles D. Brown prepared Lincoln's body, which would be viewed by millions of people over the next 20 days. Lincoln was dressed in the black suit he had worn for his second inauguration, with a white low collar, small bow tie and white gloves.



Ford's Theatre, April 1865, draped in black crepe following the Lincoln assassination





Above: Lincoln Special Locomotive Nashville prepared to pull the train in Cleveland, Ohio | Alamy Photo  
 Opposite Page: W.M. Raymond & Co. Advertisement, Manufacturers of metallic burial cases and caskets  
 President Abraham Lincoln funeral procession after leaving New York City Hall | Alamy Photo

Lincoln’s coffin, crafted by Undertaker Frank T. Sands, was solid walnut, covered with black broadcloth with rows of silver buttons, stars and tassels, eight silver handles and a white satin interior.

It was announced that President Lincoln and his son, William Wallace “Willie” Lincoln, who died in the White House at age 11 in 1862 of typhoid fever, would make the final journey from Washington to their home in Springfield aboard the first special funeral train in U.S. history. Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton issued orders taking command of the entire railroad system. The special funeral train was under the command of Brig. Gen. Daniel Craig McCallum, superintendent of U.S. military railroad transportation.

After the president lay in state in the White House, a service attended by 600 invited guests was held in the East Room at 12:10 p.m. Wednesday. Following the service, Lincoln’s coffin was placed in a hearse drawn by six white horses waiting in front of the executive mansion. At 2 p.m., with minute guns firing and church bells tolling, the military funeral procession proceeded down Pennsylvania Avenue to the U.S. Capitol, where the coffin was placed on an elaborate catafalque. Thousands of mourners passed by in silence to pay their respects. Lincoln was the first president to lie in state in the Capitol rotunda.

The following day, at 6:40 a.m., Lincoln’s coffin was carried out of the Capitol by honor guards and placed in a hearse bound for the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad depot, where the funeral train – the Lincoln Special – was waiting. Both coffins were placed in the presidential hearse car. Mrs. Lincoln had requested that no display be made of her son, and his coffin was put in front of his father’s, out of sight of the public. Two guards of honor sat on either side of the president’s coffin for the entire trip to Springfield.

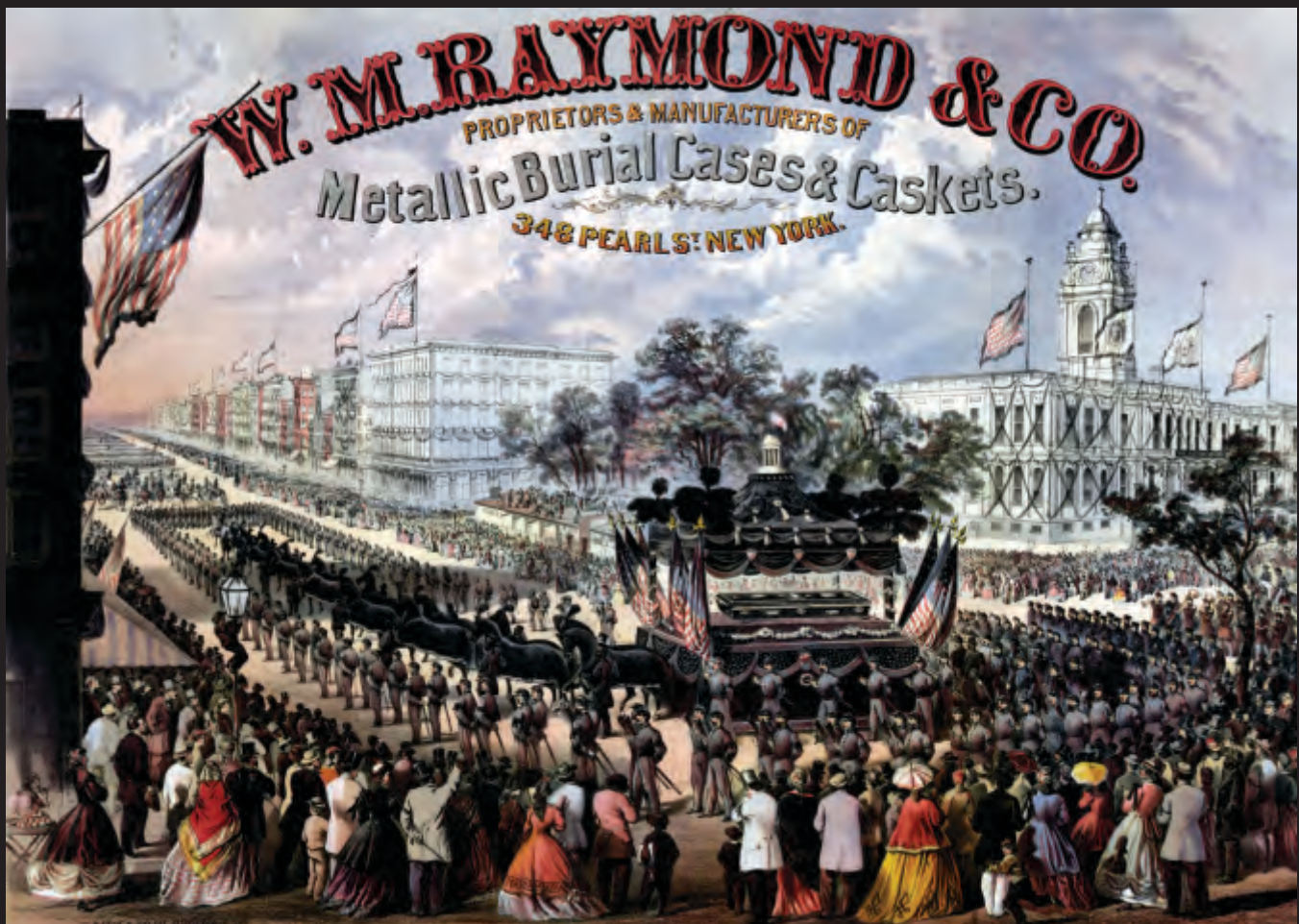
The special presidential car was built for Lincoln and his cabinet in 1864 in Alexandria, Virginia, under the supervision of the car's designer – U.S. Military Railroad System Superintendent of Car Repair Benjamin P. Lamason. The United States was one of the most opulent cars of its time, a lavish presidential office on wheels, but Lincoln never traveled in it prior to his death.

The presidential car had three stately compartments for working, seating and sleeping, with upholstered rich, green walls and etched glass windows. There were 16 extra-wide wheel treads to accommodate the different-gauge tracks and for a smoother ride. It was painted a rich chocolate brown and claret red with a large U.S. crest – the presidential seal at the time – on its side. After Lincoln's death, the car was converted into a presidential hearse car with stars, tassels and black bunting affixed to the outside. The train would make many stops, and, to make it easier to remove the coffin from the car, one of the back railings was taken out and a simple roller system installed.

The special funeral train consisted of nine cars, including the hearse car – always the last car before the caboose – a baggage car and various passenger cars. Two sleeping cars were added to the train at night and detached in the morning. The cars were handsomely draped with black garland, under the direction of Joseph Homes, superintendent of the Car Department at West Albany, New York.

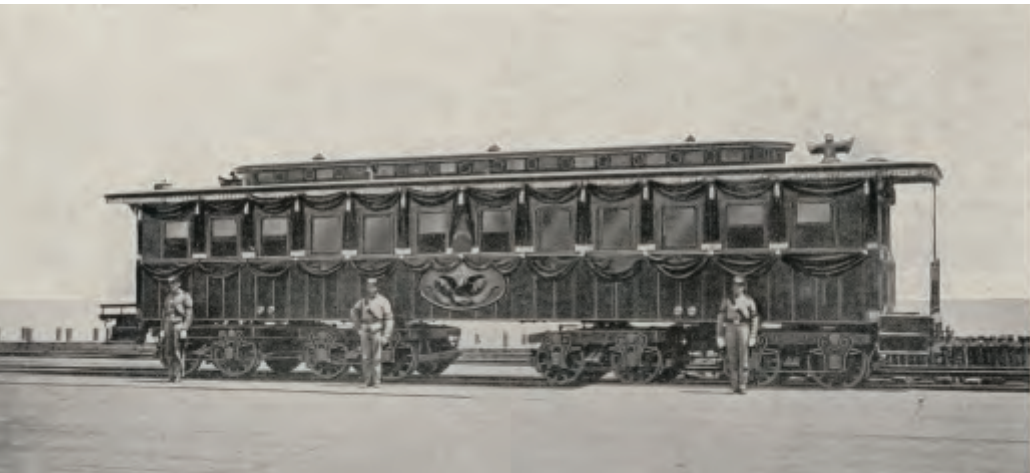
Many steam locomotives were used to pull the funeral train, all decorated with bunting and black crepe. A photograph of President Lincoln, provided by various railroads, often was fastened to the front of the engines.

The train route was the same one the president-elect traveled for his first inauguration in 1861. The funeral train made 11 scheduled stops in Baltimore, Harrisburg,





Top Left: Elaborate funeral hearse with eight plumbs, gold trim, and silver emblems awaiting the President's coffin in Springfield, Illinois | NMFH Photo



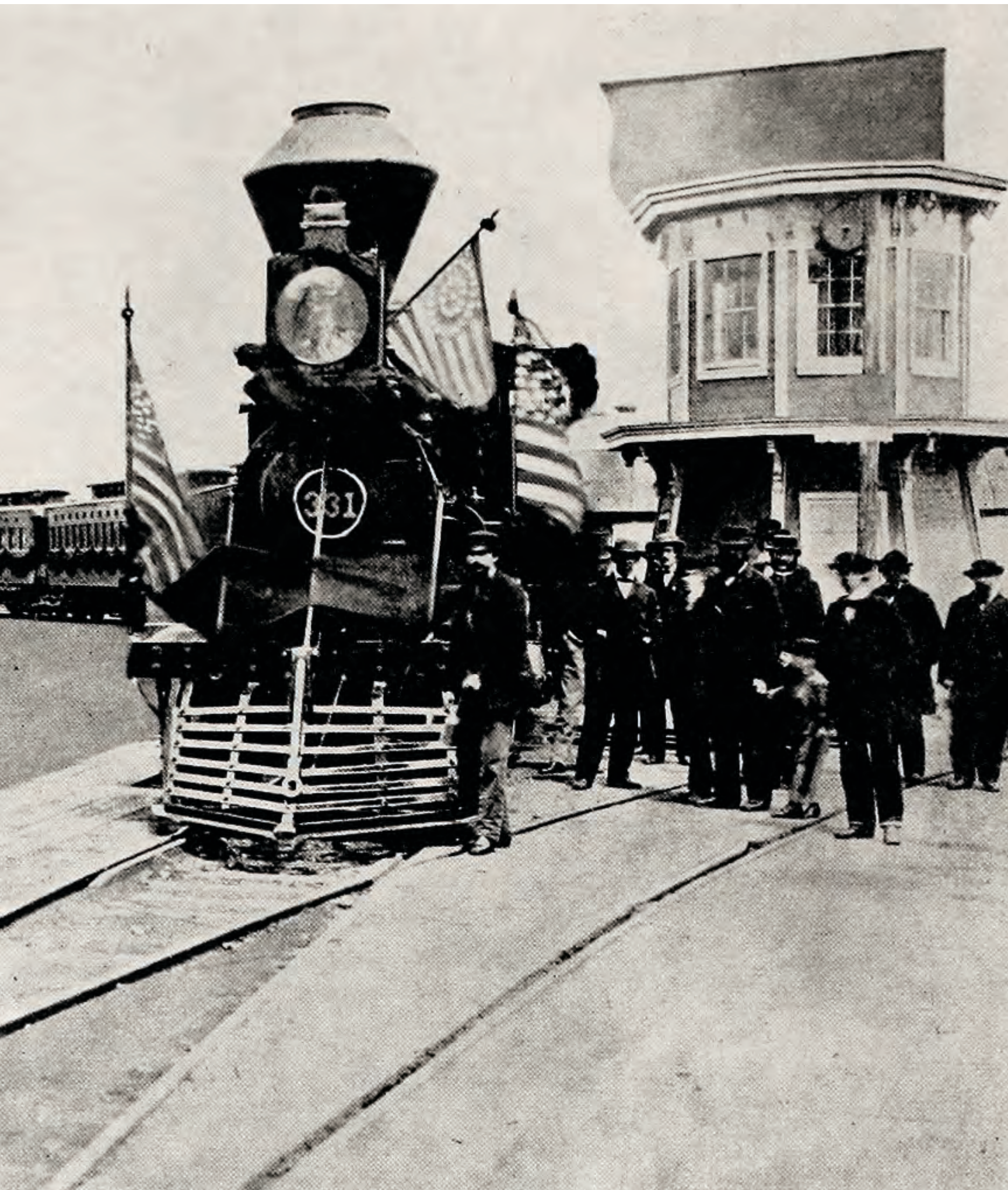
Middle Left: Lincoln funeral train car, United States, under guard during the Chicago stop Robert Teed Photo



Bottom Left: Lincoln's funeral procession passing the State House in Columbus, Ohio

Right Page: President Lincoln's funeral train, in Philadelphia, near the start of its 13 day 1,600 mile journey from Washington, D.C. to Springfield, Illinois Alamy Photo







Philadelphia, New York City, Albany, Buffalo, Cleveland, Columbus, Indianapolis, Chicago and Springfield. At each stop, Lincoln's coffin was taken off the train by honor guards and placed on an elaborately decorated horse-drawn hearse provided by the city. Large, solemn funeral processions consisting of thousands of participants proceeded to black-draped public buildings – City Halls, state Capitols, Statehouses, courthouses and a public square in Cleveland – for the viewing and services.

Newspapers across the country publicized the train's schedule, enabling millions of citizens to gather along the route to catch a glimpse of the funeral train.

It was a rainy, gloomy Wednesday morning. The funeral train, with the two coffins, 300 invited guests and Capt. Robert Todd Lincoln, the only family member, all were on board. Mrs. Lincoln remained at the White House; she was too distraught to make the long train trip.

Two embalmers were aboard, keeping Lincoln's body fresh for the 13 days of viewings and services.



Above: President Abraham Lincoln lying in State in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda on April 19-21, 1865

Left Page: The only daguerreotype photograph to survive, taken of Lincoln in death, by photographer Jeremiah Gurney Jr. in the New York City Hall on April 24, 1865,

At precisely 8 a.m., the engineer of the funeral train leaned his head out of the cab window and released the brakes of the mighty engine, which was heavily draped in black. Leaving Washington, it chugged northward to Baltimore on the president's final journey home to Springfield. To prevent delays, a pilot train with two rail cars preceded the funeral train by 10 minutes, clearing the tracks and announcing the impending arrival of the Lincoln Special.

The funeral train mainly traveled at night, often in heavy rain and chilly wind, at the mandatory speed of 20 mph through cities, towns and villages and no faster than 5 mph through rail stations and depots. Along the long route, thousands of citizens of every walk of life traveled long distances by wagon, buggy, horseback and even on foot to show their respect. They stood in unison along the cold steel track, men with their heads uncovered, women waving small flags and singing societies performing dirges and hymns while patiently waiting.

Many were holding torches, and blazing bonfires lit up the dark skies to illuminate the funeral train as it appeared and then quickly disappeared into the still of the night, bringing an end to the historic moment.





Two guards attending the temporary tomb of Abraham Lincoln in Oak Ridge Cemetery following the funeral rites

At a majority of the stops, special groups of women dressed in white with black scarves or sashes entered the funeral car and placed flowers, emblems and evergreens on Lincoln's coffin while bands played mournful music.

With smoke billowing from its stack, the Lincoln Special continued on its journey, slowing down as it approached the Rockville Bridge, built in 1849 across the Susquehanna River above Harrisburg. A young railroad lever man named S. Hoover pulled the freezing cold rail switch that sent the Lincoln Special along its homeward route to Springfield.

It was reported that five miles before the train reached Columbus, Ohio, an elderly woman was standing along the track, tears rolling down her cheeks as she extended her arms toward the passing funeral train. In one hand was a bouquet of wildflowers and in the other she held a black scarf. Some of the passengers on the train raised their hands as a gesture to her outpouring of grief.

Shortly before 9 a.m. on the warm Wednesday morning of May 3, the pilot train appeared in the distance. Not far behind on the horizon, the smoke plume could be seen from the Chicago and Alton Railroad engine No. 58, pulling the funeral train on its final leg from Chicago to Springfield. The sound of church bells tolled, fire from minute guns echoed in the distance and a sea of mourners as far as the eye could see surrounded the depot to greet the funeral train.

The special funeral train came to a final stop after traveling 1,666 miles in 13 days across seven states, through more than 440 cities, villages, towns and byways, utilizing 15 different railroads and two car ferries – and it was only one hour late when it arrived at 9 a.m.

Lincoln's coffin was carried off the train by honor guards dressed in robin's-egg-blue uniforms to an elaborate black hearse built in Philadelphia in 1857. It was adorned with gold trim and silver emblems on each side, with the addition of a silver plate engraved with the initials "A.L." Eight large black plumes were attached to the roof of the hearse, which was drawn by six black horses draped in mourning provided by the Lynch & Arnot Livery Company of St. Louis. It proceeded to the Statehouse for public viewing.

The following day at noon, Lincoln's coffin was placed in the black hearse. Old Bob, the president's 16-year-old horse, wearing black cloth and trimmed with silver fringe, was led by two grooms following behind the hearse. The funeral procession, under the direction of Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker, proceeded to Oak Ridge Cemetery, where many thousands of mourners waited. The coffins of President Lincoln and his son were carefully placed on a marble slab in the newly constructed tomb. Dr. Phineas D. Gurley concluded the burial service with a prayer, and, after the mourners departed the cemetery, the iron gates and heavy wooden doors of the tomb were closed and locked.

The presidential train car, never used again by the U.S. government, was sold for \$6,850 to the Union Pacific Railroad. The car had changed hands several times over the years when, on March 18, 1911, a prairie fire near Minneapolis destroyed 10 residential city blocks in Columbia Heights, including the presidential train car that had carried Lincoln's body to his final resting place in Springfield, Illinois.



The Lincoln Tomb in Oak Ridge Cemetery of Abraham Lincoln, his wife, Mary Todd Lincoln, and three of their four sons, Edward, William, and Thomas  
Raymond Cunningham Photo

# *The Remains of President Lincoln.*

## THE DEPARTURE OF THE SPECIAL TRAIN FOR SPRINGFIELD

Yesterday the throng of persons visiting the remains of the late president, as they laid in state in the Capitol, continued until dark, at which time the doors were closed and the guard for the night, consisting of the Capitol Police, Capt. Newman, and a detail from the 12 Veteran Reserves, set. The number of visitors is estimated at about forty thousand, and but for the inclement weather the number would have been probably twice as many. The coffin was covered with a profusion of natural flowers, from the hand affection. The catafalco (which was trimmed by Mr. G. L. Kirby, of the Capitol Police,) was surrounded by a platform, which the crowd ascended, passing to the head of the coffin, and then to the west door of the rotunda, and out of the building.

### **The Removal of the Remains to the Railroad Station.**

About six o'clock this morning the members of the Cabinet, the Illinois delegations, the pall bearers, and several officers of the army with Senators, assembled in the rotunda and after taking a farewell look at the corpse it was removed to a hearse by the same sergeants who carried the corpse on Wednesday and under a guard of honor, composed of the companies of Captains Crome, Bush, Hillebrand and Dillon, of the 12th V.R.C., under the command of Lieut. Col. Bell, the remains were taken to the depot, the Cabinet and others following.

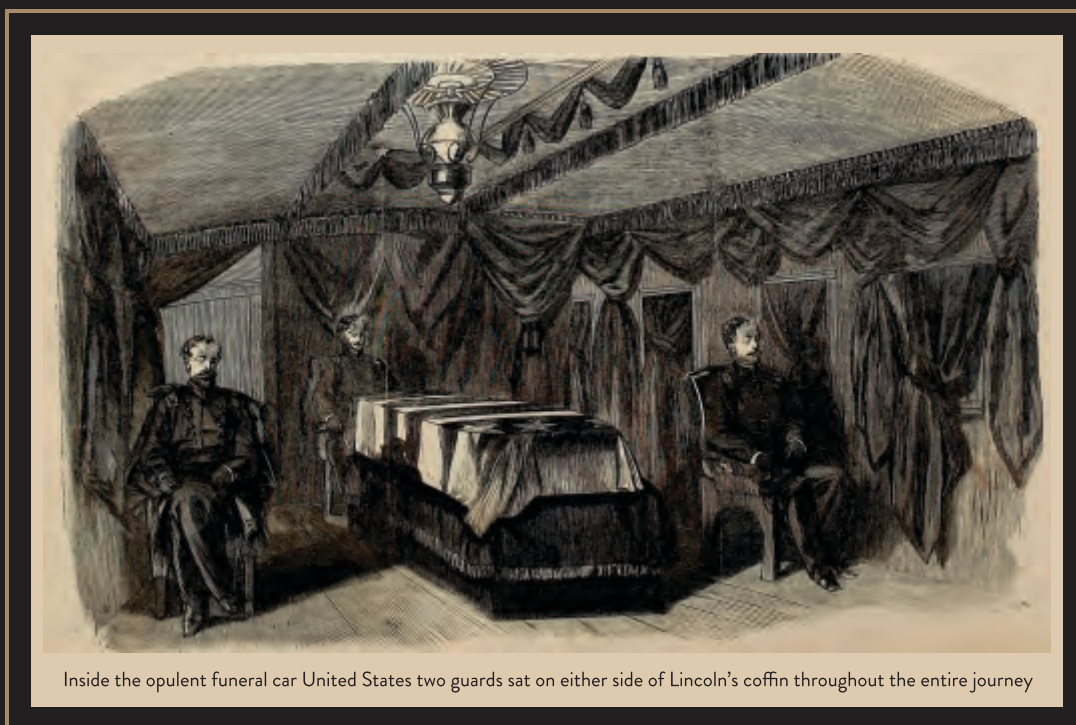
The remains of little Willie Lincoln, who died in February, 1862, and were placed in a vault at Oak Hill Cemetery, were

removed to the depot about the same time, and placed in the same car with the remains of his lamented father. The body was embalmed at the time by Drs Brown and Alexander, and placed in a metallic burial container; but yesterday the case was placed in a handsome black walnut coffin, silver mounted. The silver plate on the bust of the burial case is inscribed –

William Wallace Lincoln  
Born December 21st, 1850  
Died February 20th, 1862

The remains of father and son were placed on the car next to the rear, one which was built for the U.S. Military Railroad, originally for the President and other dignitaries. It contains a parlor, sitting room and sleeping apartment. Yesterday it was put in mourning by Mr. John Alexander, the windows being hung with black curtains and the entire furniture robed in black. Along the top, outside, is a row of mourning gathered to black and white rosettes, and another similar row extends around the car below the windows. This car is in charge of Mr. John McNaughton, U.S. M.R.R. A plain stand, covered with black cloth, was placed in the south end of the car, on which the remains of the President were placed, and on a like stand at the opposite end the remains of little Willie rested.

Evening Star (Washington District of Columbia) April 21, 1865



Inside the opulent funeral car United States two guards sat on either side of Lincoln's coffin throughout the entire journey