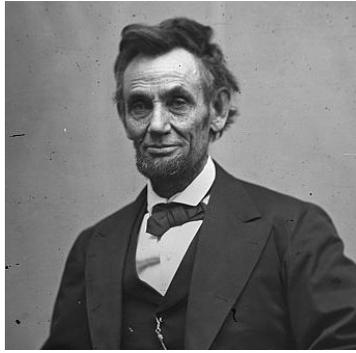


President Lincoln Visits City Point and Petersburg

March 24 - April 8, 1865

Petersburg National Battlefield



Does this man look like he needs a vacation to you?

Apparently Mrs. Julia Grant thought so when she encouraged her husband, General Ulysses S. Grant to extend an invitation for President Abraham Lincoln to visit Grant at his Army Headquarters in City Point, (Hopewell) Virginia in March of 1865. On March 20 the President responded favorably to the "kind invitation" and on March 23 Lincoln, his wife, Mary Todd and their son Tad boarded the passenger ship "River Queen" in Washington, D.C. and would arrive at City Point the following evening at 9:00 p.m.

Vacation aside, there were more important reasons for President Lincoln to visit City Point. The Siege of Petersburg was well into its ninth month. General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, under the strain of severed supply lines, mounting casualties, and dwindling morale, had weakened considerably and many were finally starting to see a possible end to the most destructive event the young nation had ever seen. The President needed to be with his top military officers so he could see the war to its end. He, apparently, also felt it was important to show his support to the soldiers on the front lines.

City Point (Hopewell), Virginia

March 25 - Visiting the Troops

On March 25, the President, along with a large party of guests including officers and wives, boarded a train and headed toward Petersburg. Among the many sights Lincoln witnessed were hundreds of Confederate soldiers who had been taken prisoner during the Battle of Fort Stedman which had occurred very early that morning. His joy at seeing the results of a significant Union victory soon subsided when, later in the day at

Patrick Station, south of Petersburg, he saw another result of battle; wounded and dead soldiers. Union Captain John Barnes overheard the subdued President express that "he had seen enough of the horrors of war and had hoped that this was the beginning of the end and that there would be no more bloodshed or ruin of homes".

March 28 - River Queen Conference



March 26 & 27 saw the President visiting areas to the north of Petersburg such as Point of Rocks in Chesterfield County. On March 28, however, much of the day's activity involving Lincoln centered around the River Queen anchored at City Point. The most notable event of that day involved a meeting in which General Ulysses S. Grant, General William T. Sherman, and Admiral David D. Porter sat down with the President onboard the River Boat. Colonel Horace Porter described the gathering as,

"... an informal interchange of views between the four men who... held the destiny of the nation in their hands."

During this morning meeting, Grant, Sherman, and Porter updated the President about their

plans to bring an end to Lee's Army and end the war. Grant and Sherman expressed the belief that at least one more major battle was necessary to dispose of the Army of Northern Virginia. The President voiced disappointment at this news stating that he had hoped no more bloodshed would be necessary. General Sherman made it clear that only the Confederate government could prevent further bloodshed by surrendering. President Lincoln took the opportunity at that time to present his instructions about surrender proceedings.

"Let them surrender and go home... let them have their horses to plow with and, if you like, their guns to shoot crows with... Give them the most liberal and honorable of terms."

April 8 - Depot Field Hospital

"I came here to take by the hand the men who have achieved our glorious victories."

On April 8, President Lincoln left the comfort of the River Queen, came ashore, and with a group including his wife, visited the Depot Field Hospital. The Depot Field Hospital, with 10,000 beds, was the largest of four military hospitals at City Point. The hospital consisted of 90 stockade pavilions, 50 by 20 feet in size, and 452 tents during the winter but more tents were added by the time of the President's visit. Those patients with the ability to move about waited in a line outside of each facility and had a chance to shake the President's hand. Bedridden patients each received a personal visit by Lincoln. The soldiers, according

to hospital attendant Wilbur Fisk, were "pleased.. beyond measure" but Fisk also pointed out that it appeared that Lincoln "took almost as much pleasure in honoring the boys, as the boy did in receiving the honor from him."

Lincoln's compassion was evident throughout as he did his best to encourage the suffering soldiers but, on at least one occasion, was brought to tears at the sight of ghastly wounds and mutilated bodies. By day's end, the exhausted President had shaken the hands of over 6,000 patients, including sick and wounded Confederate soldiers.

Departure - April 8

Later that evening, following his visit to the Depot Field Hospital, there would be little time for President Lincoln to rest. A large party was planned onboard the River Queen featuring high ranking officers and other prominent guests. The party ended at 10:00 p.m. and the ship began its journey back to Washington soon after.

The following day, April 9 was eventful as General Robert E. Lee surrendered his Army of Northern Virginia to General Grant at Appomattox Court House and the Civil War was finally reaching its conclusion. President Abraham Lincoln and his wife Mary Todd arrived back in Washington at 6:00 p.m. Upon their return, Mrs. Lincoln stated concern about "enemies" in the City to which the President replied, "Enemies, never again must we repeat that word." He was assassinated six days later.

President Lincoln in Petersburg, Virginia

One day following the evacuation of Confederate troops from the City of Petersburg, President Abraham Lincoln decided to visit the formerly besieged city on April 3, 1865. One of his concerns was how the civilians of the city would react to his arrival. The citizens had just endured 292 days of fear, uncertainty, hardship, and death. Some had hoped for a Confederate victory while many Black citizens had prayed for freedom. Therefore it was not surprising to see a variety of responses to the President's visit. Some people chose to close their curtains and ignore the tall man in the top hat. Others came out into the street and cheered his arrival. Despite the various feelings being expressed by the citizens, dignity often prevailed as demonstrated by respected Petersburg politician Thomas Wallace. Mr. Wallace had known Abraham Lincoln from the time he was a Congressman as they were both members of the Whig party. Where some people may have allowed their feelings of resentment to influence their actions, Thomas Wallace welcomed the 16th President of the United States to his home in order to meet with General Grant.

Another local citizen Lincoln had known from his time in Congress, was Confederate General Roger A. Pryor. The President attempted to visit Pryor at the home he was renting. Lincoln, instead, met with Pryor's wife, Sara. Mrs. Pryor rejected the President's request to visit her husband on the grounds that Roger "was a paroled prisoner, that General Lee was still in the field, and that he could hold no conference with the head of the opposing army." In this case, resentment prevailed.

April 3 - City of Petersburg

On the morning of April 3, Lincoln was informed that Petersburg had finally fallen to Federal troops. He decided to go into the city and was accompanied by Admiral David Porter, Captain John Barnes, William Crook, and Lincoln's son, Tad on a special train. Upon arriving at the station along the U.S. Military Railroad, Lincoln took his seat on Grant's horse, Cincinnati and with the others rode into the city over the Jerusalem Plank Road.

Lincoln and his entourage arrived at the Thomas Wallace house and, while Lincoln and Grant discussed that Grant should defeat Lee and allow Sherman to defeat Joseph Johnston's army in North Carolina, Tad grew restless until Federal general George Sharpe produced sandwiches. Tad eagerly grabbed them as he exclaimed that being hungry was what had agitated him. Thomas Wallace invited the President and General Grant inside but they opted to remain on the porch. After an hour and a half in the city, Lincoln left to return to City Point.



*The Thomas Wallace House (Not open to the public)
204 South Market Street, Petersburg*

April 7 - Return to Petersburg

After visiting Richmond on April 4th, Lincoln returned to Petersburg on April 7th with his wife, Mary, her seamstress and confidante, Elizabeth Keckly, and a few others. While in the city on this day, President Lincoln went to Centre Hill Mansion and spoke privately with General George Hartsuff now in charge of the city.



*Centre Hill Mansion, City of Petersburg Museums
Open to the Public
1 Centre Hill Avenue, Petersburg
(804) 733-2401 www.petersburg-va.org/tourism/chill*

Elizabeth Keckly



Elizabeth Keckly lived on North Sycamore Street in Petersburg from 1845-1847.

Elizabeth (Hobbs) Keckly (born 1818) returned to Petersburg with President and Mrs. Lincoln on April 7, 1865 for the first time in twenty years. She had been born into slavery in Dinwiddie County, Virginia and briefly lived in Petersburg in the 1840s but much had changed since then. After moving with her owner to St. Louis, Elizabeth and her son gained their freedom in 1855.

After moving to Washington, D.C., in 1860, she began sewing dresses for prominent women including Varina Davis, who became the Confederacy's first lady during the Civil War; and Mary Custis Lee, wife of future Confederate general Robert E. Lee. During the Civil War, she worked for First Lady Mary Lincoln. Unfortunately, her son (who was able to pass for white) was killed in battle in 1861. She plunged herself into more work by organizing the Contraband Relief Association which provided help to those who had escaped slavery and were living around the nation's capital.

When Keckly entered Petersburg on that April day she was not impressed with Petersburg. She wrote in her memoirs that the war "had brought many changes to the city so well known to me in the days of my youth. I found a number of old friends, but the greater portion of the population were strange to me." Perhaps she could not find many people she once knew due to Petersburg's active slave trade in the years since she had left. Keckly said that the "painful memories" made her "not sorry to turn my back again upon the city."

Unfortunately the publication of Keckly's memoirs ruined her relationship with Mary Lincoln due to the inclusion of Mrs. Lincoln's personal letters, and despite her attempts to gain lucrative employment, Elizabeth Keckly died alone, in poor health, and impoverished in 1907 in Washington, D.C.