
THE ALEXANDRIA CHRONICLE



ALEXANDRIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

Spring 1995 Vol 3. No. 1.

PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S RAILROAD CAR

by

H. Robert Slusser

The only railroad coach ever built by the United States Government for the use of a president in his executive duties was an artifact of Alexandria. It was built in the Orange & Alexandria Railroad car shops while they were being operated by the U.S. Military Railroad of Virginia in the mid-1860s. The shops were originally built by the Orange & Alexandria southwest of the corner of Duke and Alfred Streets in the early 1850s. They were taken over by the USMRR on the 24th of May 1861 when the Union Army moved across the Potomac to protect the capital at the beginning of the Civil War. The shops were expanded during the course of the Union occupation, and were returned after the War on June 27, 1865 to the Virginia Board of Public Works. Under military officers, the USMRR turned to operating railroads in the North for work staff in the shops. In the shops, they repaired locomotives, designed and built bridges and trestles and modular housing,¹ invented tools for ripping up and bending rails and devices for straightening bent rails, repaired railroad cars and built

cars for ordinary and for special uses.²

Probably the most unique car made at the shops was the one built from November 1863 to February 1865³ for the use of President Lincoln. Much care and effort went into the design and construction of the car, but the only governmental use it ever had was as a funeral car after the President was assassinated just as the War was ending. It was the focal point of a special train that took him back to his home town of Springfield, Illinois. After that interlude, and with the end of the War, the car began 46 years of life as private property west of the Mississippi. A few ups and many downs characterized these years, climaxing in its ignominious accidental end in a field fire, with any remaining pieces carried off as souvenirs to disappear almost completely.

For such an illustrious object, official records of the car's creation are sparse or undiscoverable. It was built in the shops of the USMRR for the occupant of the White

House, but the archives of neither institution have yielded any request, order, supply voucher, or other record that initiated or financed its construction and furnishing. Numerous careful and thorough researchers over the years have eventually concluded that "Who authorized construction is not definitely known,"⁴ "...is not entirely clear,"⁵ or "...has been lost"⁶. What is known was mostly recorded from memory decades after the fact.

In 1897, for example, W.H.H.Price wrote:

In reply to yours of the 13th inst., I would say that I know that I am the only living man that had anything to do with managing the building of President Lincoln's private car. I was foreman at one of the car shops at Alexandria, Virginia under B. P. Lamason, superintendent car department, United States Military Railroad of Virginia, and as foreman had charge of building the car from start to finish. The work was begun in November, 1863, and was finished in February, 1865. Some time during the year 1863 Mr. Lamason conceived the idea or received orders to build a private car for the use of the President...⁷

However, in 1903, Sidney D. King was alive to relate to an interviewer:

I was assistant master car builder at that time, was in the shops constantly while the car was being built...⁸

According to a bulletin of the Lincoln

National Life Foundation:

James T. Barkley of San Diego, California, in his reminiscences published in the New York Times December 13, 1930 wrote: "In December, 1863, I was detailed on recommendation of General McCallum, by General Thomas Holt, to build a new car for the president." Barkley stated that the rear of the car was to be Lincoln's quarters and the front room a washroom.⁹

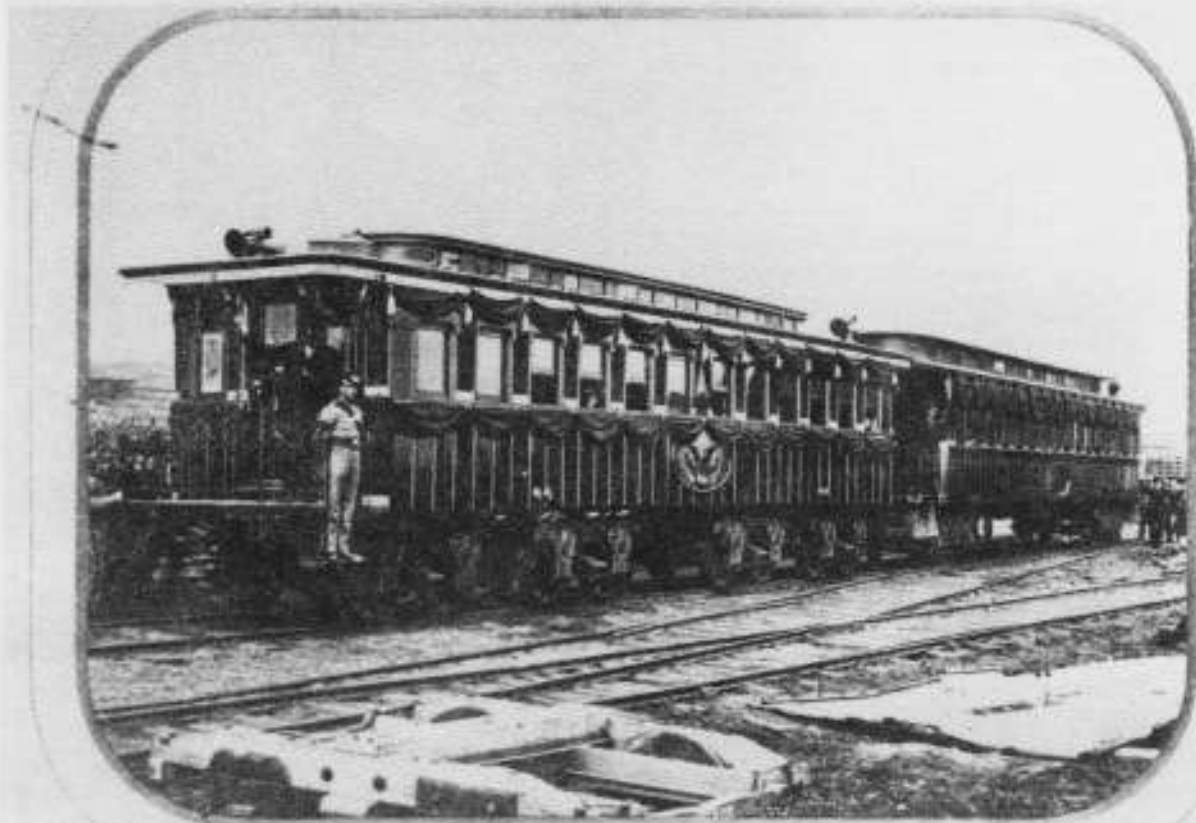
This elusiveness of firm information about the birth of the car continues to cloud information about almost every aspect of its ensuing life.

THE PRESIDENTIAL CAR 1863 - 1866

DESCRIPTION AND BUILDING OF THE LINCOLN CAR

"It was really magnificent for those days, and every available convenience was used, but present day travelers would consider it very common."¹⁰ This was the opinion in 1903 of Sidney King, recalling the building of the Lincoln Car from his days as assistant master car builder in the shops where it was built. King is one of many writers, whose names are mentioned in the preface and cited in the notes, who have contributed extensive descriptions of the car and its construction in the shops. Characteristically, the several descriptions are inconsistent on numerous points. From their descriptions we may gather a picture with overlapping details.

When the building of the car began, Colonel D. C. McCallum, an acting Brevet Brigadier General, was the officer in charge of the U.S. Army military railroad system.



**Abraham Lincoln's Funeral Car as photographed in Buffalo, N.Y.,
April 27, 1865; Courtesy: Buffalo, Erie Cty. Historical Soc.**

Benjamin P. Lamason was superintendent of the car department shops. W. H. H. Price was foreman of the long government shed that had been added to the car shops, and had charge of building the car from start to finish. Sidney D. King was assistant master car builder. James T. Barkley and James Allen were the carpenters and Sergeant Robert Pierce was the artist and painter. Robert Cunningham worked on the trucks. Other men assigned to the construction of the car were Lawrence O'Day, Nate Irwin, Myron H. Lamson, and Dennis O'Day. In 1865, General J. H. Devereux was superintendent of transportation.¹¹

Foreman Price, who was a master car builder, first recorded his version of the building of the car in 1893 in a letter to the editor of the Railroad Car Journal, and in a similar account that appeared in Locomotive Engineering, September 1893. His reply of February 19, 1897 to the *Omaha Bee* appears to be another edition of the account, which is quoted at length by Paul Rigdon, an official of the Union Pacific Railroad. This was part of a detailed history of the railway that was compiled by Rigdon in 1952, combining the available documentary record with oral history of employees, relatives and others even remotely connected with the company and the Lincoln car, and revealing

his own interest in the car and its furnishings over the preceding thirty years.¹² Assistant car builder King in 1903 made a signed statement adding his recollections to those of Mr. Price. This statement was reproduced in 1923 by Mutal Magazine of the Pennsylvania Railroad and in 1927 by John W. Starr, Jr. in his Lincoln and the Railroads. Price and King's two accounts provide the bulk of the following description, again not without inconsistencies.

and the others took great pride in the project and tried to make it fully worthy of the Chief Executive. Lamason began the design in late 1863. Assumptions that the President himself had any part in it cannot be substantiated, but in 1892 a master mechanic of the Union Pacific Railroad, then owner of the car, said without attribution in a detailed history of it, "The car was built as nearly as possible to suit Mr. Lincoln's idea and was so peculiar in construction as to give it individual characteristics."¹³

The car was designed for the general use of the Chief Executive. On the pattern of cars of the Pennsylvania Railroad at the time, it was 48 feet in length, the center of the roof was raised, with fifteen clerestory windows in the raised part between the two levels of the roof. There were twelve main windows on each side of the car and below the windows, on a metal oval panel five feet by two feet was painted the coat of arms of the United States. The words "United States" were painted in a semi-circle on the window panel above the oval. The car was painted a rich chocolate brown, rubbed out to a fine finish with oil, rotten stone and the bare hand. Fine gold striping on the body and clerestory was the only decoration, other than the polished brass-capped nuts for the bolster tie rods on the car's side above the trucks and very ornate axle box pedestals at the ends of

each axle. These were Lamason's own design, to which he is said to have devoted weeks of effort.¹⁴

Victor Searcher's description says "the understructure of the car employed girders instead of the conventional truss-type then in use. To the girders iron plates were riveted that reached from sill to window, thus in effect making the lower half of the car bulletproof. This gave rise to the legend of an 'iron-clad' railroad coach for President Lincoln." Ignoring the futility of armorplate in a car with two dozen windows, some writers have tried to rationalize the probability of its use. Raymond Borchers, for example, went on to speculate when and by whom the armor plate was later removed. Most writers preferred the memories of the eyewitness carbuilders. Sidney King wrote "Newspapers lately say 'that it was ironclad—armored plate being set beneath its upholstered sides.' *This is a mistake...* Anyone who knew the habits of Mr. Lincoln would scout the idea of his designing an armored car of such luxurious appointments for his own use in going to the front. Just when the fact of its being built came to his knowledge I do not know...he utterly refused to accept the car or ride in it during his lifetime."¹⁵

As a mid-construction modification, two four-wheel trucks were joined in place of the usual single truck at each end, producing an almost continuous row of Lamason's ornate axle box pedestals. The wheels were of wider than usual tread design intended to fit minor variations of width between rails extant at that time—between-rail distance had not yet been standardized at 56 1/4 inches.¹⁶ Multiple versions of the technical details of the trucks are available.¹⁷ "The large observation platform and the system of heating were new to the cars of that period and marked a distinct advance in railway

construction."¹⁸ No name or number was given to the car.

Forty-two feet long inside, the space may have been divided into "a parlor and drawing room at either end, with a side aisle and stateroom in the center, [t]he stateroom...planned as the President's compartment, [and] a small washroom...located in the drawing room."¹⁹ Alternatively, it may have been "Divided into dining room, stateroom, and parlor, keeping the bedroom completely private...and in the center...the most comfortable place for railroad travel."²⁰ Or "divided into three compartments, viz., drawing room, parlor, and state-room, the latter being in the center of the car...[with] drawing room and parlor...connected by an aisle extending along the wall inside of the car, and in the drawing room end a saloon was placed"²¹ Or again, "A door in the vestibule of the coach [may have] opened into a narrow passageway which extended the entire length of the car along one side, [from which] doors opened into each of the three private rooms, [the] room in the rear end of the car, the stateroom, considerably larger than the others..."²² Borchers also had the passage way extending the full length of one side.²³

More difficult to understand is the description of an upholsterer, Joseph Kragaskow, who came to the Union Pacific Railroad to work on the car after it had been in use by U. P. for two and a half years. He remembered "first, observation room 12 feet lengthwise of car; second, one bedroom 9 feet; third, one bedroom 9 feet; fourth, dining room 10 feet;..." thus using up 40 feet of the 42-foot inside length recalled by one of the builders of the car, W. H. H. Price. Yet Kragaskow continued "...remainder of the forward end of the car being taken up by the kitchen and servants' quarters."²⁴ Assuming one less bedroom would leave possible space

for the service facilities, but White referred specifically to "The absence of a kitchen and crew's quarters."²⁵

Kragaskow's recollections were recorded more than half a century after the car had passed out of U. P.'s first ownership.

The car is understood to have been outfitted more as an elegant drawing room-parlor rather than a self-sufficient private car,²⁶ although the four sofas, two of them 7½ feet long for the President's tall stature, had hinged backs that would allow them to be made up as beds. For linens or for serving meals, a separate car would have been necessary, however, as the car had no provision for supplies, cooking, or crew.²⁷

Woodwork in the interior was of black walnut and oak. The walls were upholstered from the seat rail to the headlining with rich corded crimson silk which had a tufted pattern. The headlining, also of crimson silk, was gathered in each panel to a rosette in the center. The clerestory above was painted zinc white and decorated with the coats of arms of the states. The curtains were of light green silk. Searcher described oil paintings between the window spaces, chandeliers of cut glass and wall-to-wall carpeting, but thought the sides and ends of the car were upholstered in dark green plush.²⁸ The furniture was thought by some²⁹ to have been covered in dark green plush, and by others³⁰ in red plush. If the USMRR made an inventory of the car's furnishings when it was completed, the list has not yet come to light. Later on, there are lists that were reconstructed by the U. P. in the years after its purchase of the car.

Whatever its original furnishings, the car is generally accepted to have been finished shortly before the death of the President. Only Barkley's reminiscences in 1930, 65

years later, have the car being completed the third week in May, 1864.³¹ There was time, in any case, for the car to be taken on a trial run over the Orange & Alexandria RR to Warrenton, and for the builders to develop a general feeling that the President was avoiding riding in it. His reluctance is generally attributed to derogatory comments about the undemocratic opulence of such a conveyance published by un-named anti-administration New York newspapers. Tracking down alleged comments in a potential eleven months of several daily newspapers would use up time that no researcher has found to date, but writers³² routinely charge Lincoln's political sensitivity as the reason for his failure to use the special car.

On the 14th of April 1865, work in the car shops was pervaded with excitement as everyone again awaited the President's reply to the invitation of Superintendent Lamson and General J. H. Devereux for him to take a trial ride on April 15th.³³ Instead, that evening Lincoln was assassinated, and within days, Myron H. Lamson, a member of the Washington City Home Guards and an enlisted mechanic in the service of the Baltimore and Ohio Railway Company was converting the car into a hearse. He built a catafalque to hold the President's coffin in the center of the stateroom, now to be heavily draped in black with heavy cords and tassels. The catafalque was shaped like a pyramid with a railing surrounding it, and it was possible for people to view the remains in the car. It was possible to remove the remains with little difficulty, when special memorial services were held in several cities along the route.³⁴ (This seems to confirm the end location of the stateroom among the several floor plans that have been described.) Borchers, but no others wrote that the car was repainted before being appropriately draped.³⁵

April, May 1865

"Now the windows were hung with somber curtains and the furniture was encased in black. Above the windows on the outside a series of alpaca festoons was held by silver stars from which descended silver tassels. Strips of black velvet ending in silver fringe graced each window panel. Below the windows another series of alpaca festoons was caught up with silver stars. With its sixteen-wheeled running gear, the conveyance was the cynosure of all eyes and added authentic dignity to the cortege ensemble."³⁶

Preparation of the car was only a side event to an officious tug-of-war that the bereaved Mary Todd Lincoln had to umpire about where the President would be interred and how many obsequies would be held and where. New York newspapers promoted a memorial in that city, where his remains would then be enshrined. Commissioners and Congress passed resolutions in favor of the national capitol, or Congressional Cemetery. Others favored the center of his home town, Springfield, Illinois. The retelling of these distressful decisions is given by Searcher in The Farewell to Lincoln³⁷

As soon as Mrs. Lincoln agreed to interment in Springfield, everyone assumed that the return trip would approximate the inaugural trip of February, 1861. That trip had zig-zagged from Springfield for 1904 miles through dozens of cities in seven states over twelve days, with thirty addresses and speeches and countless personal appearances before reaching

Washington.³⁸ Meetings of citizens were held in the principal cities of all the loyal states to make formal note of their condolences and to arrange obsequies in their communities. From these groups came unrelenting pressure to have a cortege routed through their cities. A delegation came from Springfield to escort the remains home. The Secretary of War appointed a commission of distinguished railroad men to arrange with the respective railroad companies time tables, rules and all things for the safe and appropriate transportation and to make public the itinerary that was agreed. An illustrious Illinois citizens commission recommended to the railroad officials commission a routing for the train that concurred with, and may have originated with the Springfield escort delegation. Every town and city on the route begged to have a stop for its citizens to show their grief and reverence. By legislative authority still in effect, the War Department declared the trip a military necessity, setting all the rules and authorizing by military orders the only persons to be allowed to travel on the train.

Each railroad company that was included in the itinerary was expected to furnish the "consist" [of cars] as well as the locomotive and crew, which would be adapted to the conditions and practices of its system. The cars and locomotive provided by the B & O to begin the trip were all new and darkly draped. The specially arranged and draped funeral car was brought from Alexandria to be the next to last car of the train. Because of the four-truck design, the car ran awkwardly and great care had to be exercised in passing over switch points.³⁹ Behind it was the officers' car loaned by the Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore Railroad. This car had been provided for the President's family, plus the Honor Guard, certain other high officials and the

train crew. It was appropriately draped before being sent down from Philadelphia.⁴⁰ Of the family who might have traveled in this car, Mrs. Lincoln in her bereavement was in no condition to make the trip with son Tad, while son Robert, on February 23, 1905, replied to General Manager A. L. Mohler of the U. P. "I was not myself on my father's funeral train."⁴¹ For the final stretch of the funeral trip, between Chicago and Springfield, this car may have been replaced by "The Pioneer," the first car completely built and financed by George Pullman.⁴² Alternatively, the "Pioneer" and another car may have been added to the train for this stretch despite the military order limiting the train to nine cars.⁴³

Ceremonies at the White House were held at noon on Wednesday. After that, the coffin was taken in solemn procession to the Capitol where it lay in state until Friday morning, when a shorter procession carried it to the B & O station at New Jersey and C Streets and placed it in the waiting funeral car. At the foot of Lincoln's casket was placed a smaller coffin, that of twelve-year-old Willie Lincoln who died in the White House in 1862.⁴⁴ At the time, it had been agreed that he would be temporarily interred in a vault at Oak Hill Cemetery in Georgetown, and would accompany the family when it left the White House, and now the occasion had arrived. According to a different description, "Inside in the front section of the car the silver-mounted casket was enfolded in the national flag and rested on a plain black-covered stand banked with a profusion of blossoms. At the other end a small coffin rested on a low stand [with] the remains of William Wallace Lincoln"⁴⁵ Conductor W. H. H. Gould's recollection fifty years later of his section of the trip from Baltimore to Harrisburg was that "In the baggage car we carried the remains of William Wallace Lincoln..."⁴⁶

THE FUNERAL TRIP April, May 1865

For twelve days through seven states the car traveled in its successive trains, carrying its precious burden to be taken off and exhibited and revered in Independence Hall,⁴⁷ four state capitols and in specially prepared locations in half a dozen other principal cities. Finally in the House of Representatives in the State House in Springfield, Illinois there was one more day of lying in state before a temporary rest while a final resting place was prepared. The funeral trains, which was preceded by a pilot locomotive to ensure safety, were limited to twenty miles an hour and five miles an hour through stations, as set by the military orders governing the excursion.

Washington, Baltimore, Harrisburg, Philadelphia, Jersey City—slowly the rail-borne funeral procession wound its way through the sorrowing heart of the Union, each city striving to out-do the last in a public frenzy of grief. *New York City, Albany, Buffalo, Cleveland*—crowds thronged the trackside, waited in line long hours to view the martyr's body, staged mournful tableaux on the hillsides by day and lighted the train's night journeys with torches and bonfires. *Columbus, Indianapolis, Chicago, Springfield*—ever-changing blankets of flowers draped the casket; delegations of young women (thirty-six in number, for the thirty-six states of the Union) brought bouquets of flowers where the train halted and knelt

weeping beside the track at innumerable points along the route. Arches of blossoms were raised over the tracks and cities were draped in mourning. At last it was over, a fantastic carnival of grief one writer called "half circus, half heartbreak."⁴⁸

It was a trip to be remembered. Among the immediate accounts is a portion of a letter written on April 29, 1865 in Poughkeepsie, N. Y. by a Union soldier to his brother back home.

President Lincoln's remains passed through here last Tuesday. It stopped here half an hour. the train consisted of nine cars. they were all trimmed beautifully in mourning and other appropriate emblems for the occasion. I saw the coffin but it was not allowed to be opened. I can not describe the coffin to you. It was trimmed beautifully and splendid wreaths of flowers ornamented it. It was a solemn sight to see the train and to hear the bells toll and the farewell salute fired in memory of the departed dead. It was estimated that there was as many as 25,000 persons at the depot when the train came in. The corpse was carried in the same car that he went to Washington in four years ago last March. It was the nicest car that I ever saw.⁴⁹

As the last sentence indicates, memories were less than reliable, since the car hadn't

been built in March 1861. Some observers remembered that the coffin was carried in a Baltimore and Ohio day coach; others recalled equally clearly that it was "The Pioneer" of Pullman; others thought there was no special "funeral car" but that the bodies were carried in baggage cars of the various railroads involved in the train's movement.⁵⁰ Another immediate account was a diary kept by one of the noncommissioned officers chosen for the working guard of honor that accompanied the remains from Washington, D. C. to Springfield, Illinois. For one stop he wrote:

At York [Pa.] a large crowd met us at the depot and presented us with a large wreath of flowers. All the buildings were draped in mourning, and many appropriate mottos were spread for our gaze, such as "Give honor to who honor is due," "The Nation mourns," and many more.⁵¹

THE CAR AFTER THE FUNERAL 1865 - 1866

Eventually the car was brought back to Alexandria. An unidentified newspaper clipping datelined May 7—just four days after the arrival in Springfield—stated that the military and naval honor guards as well as the hearse car and the state car had arrived back from Springfield.⁵² Other reports have it switched to the Chicago & Alton yards in Springfield for a time and standing on a siding in Indianapolis for some weeks.⁵³ After its return to the car shops, it may have made another trip as a funeral car. Many accounts have it journeying to Auburn or Albany, New York to carry home the body of Mrs. William H. Seward, wife of Lincoln's Secretary of State, but Borchers has pointed out that "neither the Washington nor New York

papers include such information," despite a lengthy description of the lady's funeral in the New York Times.⁵⁴ Otherwise, the car stood on a siding while the military sought ways of disposing of it along with other now surplus war gear.

Even while the funeral train was on its somber journey an advertisement had appeared in a Washington newspaper offering to sell the car to "some enterprising man,"⁵⁵ which a rival newspaper characterized as "humiliating." To dispose of railroad materials and some of the rolling stock in Alexandria, including the Lincoln car, they were put into the hands of an auction firm from Cincinnati, Ohio.⁵⁶ In the spirited bidding, the car may have been bought by "Lincoln's old law partner to keep it out of the hands of exhibitors,"⁵⁷ or "bought in to prevent its purchase by speculators by Ward H. Lamon,"⁵⁸ a trusted friend who had served as Lincoln's bodyguard and been appointed by him Marshall of the District of Columbia, or "after spirited bidding, by T. C. Durant, first vice-president of the U. P.", according to Borchers, for \$8,000,⁵⁹ and according to Frank W. Cornell, a collector of Lincoln Car memorabilia, \$6,480.⁶⁰ Thus the private life of the car began with a contest between reverence and showmanship which returned from time to time, particularly at the end of its existence.

The Union Pacific railroad (U. P.) was chartered by Congress in 1862 to build part of the first transcontinental railway. Its officers were accustomed to subsidies and favors, to which they felt it appropriate to expect the Army to add the Lincoln car. Numerous telegrams and letters among the company's Vice Presidents, Directors and officers show their intense interest in obtaining the car for their use as the new railroad was built. After some amount of manoeuvring and the auction, Durant did

become owner of the car by April 17, 1866, probably with U. P. money. It was then moved by rail, reaching St. Joseph, Missouri on the Hannibal & St. Joseph Railroad, and from there by Missouri River steamboat to Omaha, the date of its arrival now lost.⁶¹

FURNISHINGS IN THE CAR

Contemporary references to the interior furnishings of the car during its first year of existence are as elusive as any documents authorizing the building of the car itself. It might be expected that the U. P. would have made an inventory when it took possession of its historic acquisition, but none has come to light. Officers of the railroad company did have enough pride and interest in the furnishings to issue instructions asking for special handling of some of them. These file records are among the sources tapped by Paul Rigdon in his documentation of the car's history (page 2), which is the basis for this description. Otherwise, all references to the furnishings were made from memory years or decades after the actual observation.

The following list was set down from memory in 1925 by Joseph Kragaskow, an employee who joined Union Pacific as an upholsterer in 1868. By the time he first saw the car, the original military car had been modified for its role in the funeral train trip, spent a subsequent year standing on a siding in Alexandria, then sold, been used for two years as the U. P. officers' special car, and been superseded in their favor by a newer official car. One of Kragaskow's first assignments with U. P. was to make a list of the several items of furniture [the car] contained, but he and Rigdon seem to have had to rely on his memory in 1925. It may be noted that Kragaskow's fifty-some year memory had the walls of the car upholstered from the

seat rail to the floor, while car builder Price, after thirty years recalled the upholstery as being from seat rail to ceiling. Similarly, Kragaskow found the window curtains of blue "rep", while carbuilder King in 1903 recalled curtains of light green silk. Upholsterer Kragaskow's list of furniture was:

6 arm chairs; 2 large arm chairs upholstered in red plush; 2 washstands; 6 dining room chairs with wood seats and high backs, 1 table, all walnut; 2 large sofas 7 feet long and 24 inches wide; 2 small sofas 6 feet long and 24 inches wide.⁶²

In 1922 the U. P. found in the office of Thomas M. Orr, its deceased Assistant to the President, a silver service from the President's car consisting of:

large urn with side handles, small faucet with ivory handles, top cover hot water urn, suspended on hinges, or double-pivoted spindles, hinged cover, space below for alcohol lamp water pitcher, with hinged cover open top pitcher of ornate floral design two silver cups or goblets.

In 1925 a general foreman at UP's Omaha Shops stated that his recollection of the original set was:

1 large water pitcher; 6 goblets
1 butter dish; 1 spoon holder
1 small cream pitcher; 2 large fish forks; 1 large table spoon of peculiar design and a supply of tea spoons, knives, and forks, but no larger items.

Also held by the U. P. as being from the President's car are:

oak and walnut bookcase; oak desk small paper weight; wooden letter opener made from window sash of the car; four paintings over wooden

mats labeled in 1912 as being taken from the President's car; "Pikes Peak or Bust", whose companion picture was destroyed by car builders in remodeling the car around 1880 odd shaped mirror.⁶³

Rigdon traces how some pieces of furniture were re-upholstered for placing in the company's senior offices, some were sent to the New York offices, and some given to supervisors. A couch and three armchairs are held by the Missouri State Historical Society in St. Louis as furnishings from the car, which was exhibited in St. Louis in 1904. The Historical Society curator has noted that they differ from the ones in the U. P. museum in Omaha.⁶⁴ A letter in the U. P. museum file asserts that the Nebraska State Historical Society had obtained a "plush railroad couch chair" and names the two preceding owners dating back to 1893,⁶⁵ but currently the Society has nothing in its records to indicate that it ever had a chair from the Lincoln railway car.⁶⁶ The Illinois State Historical Library has one of the smaller couches and a chair, both having their original "1865" upholstery, presented by U. P. President Mohler in June 1905,⁶⁷ as well as another chair that is identified as being from the Lincoln car by an affidavit from a former employee of the Union Pacific car shops. His affidavit further says that some chairs from the car were burned when the U. P. shops burned in the summer of 1869.⁶⁸ Collector Frank W. Cornell raised the intriguing question of how the seven and eight-foot long couches could have been maneuvered onto the car through a twenty-inch-wide corridor and doors into rooms no more than 6½ feet wide.⁶⁹ The question has also been raised of the practicality of casters on some of the items now in Omaha and St. Louis for the centrifugal forces of railway travel. It has been noted further that there is no similarity of style among the items in Omaha.⁷⁰ Broadly, it

would be difficult to establish dates when any of the items became part of the furnishings of the Lincoln car.

How many of these furnishings were original from 1865 and how many were later additions, perhaps by successive U.P. presidents, is a matter of conjecture. Records have not been found to definitely tie any of them to the year of the car's official use. For example, while Reed & Barton, the manufacturers of the water urn and pitcher, identified by stamps in the metal of the bottoms of the items, had fairly complete historical data covering the concern and its notable commissions, they had nothing on the subject of Lincoln silver. They identified the stamped design as one sold through retail jewelers, and concluded that the items in the collection had been so acquired.⁷¹ Collector Cornell states that the Holland [Howland?] paintings on wood panels "were put in...when the car was worked over by the Pullman Co. for the Union Pacific shortly after they purchased it."⁷² One early account states that George M. Pullman secured some of the landscape paintings on wooden panels. He is said to have kept some of the best of the panels and presented others to his friends.⁷³ The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company has some of the Howland paintings that were part of the car.⁷⁴

PRIVATE RAILROAD USE OF THE CAR: 1866--1903

For a while, the railroad used the car with its resplendent interiors for the illustrious purposes for which Vice President Durant had envisioned it. On October 25, 1866, it was used in Durant's excursion train to mark the completion of track construction to the 247th milepost at the 100th meridian.⁷⁵ A special building was constructed at Omaha to house it while not in service.⁷⁶ This shed was located near

Tenth and Chicago Streets inside of the Union Pacific shop grounds and was known to old shop men as late as 1925 as the Lincoln Shed and the track under it as the Lincoln Track. The car was kept therein until some time in the year 1872.⁷⁷ "The chairs that had been used by the pallbearers were taken out of the car and distributed through the offices of the Railroad Company."⁷⁸ Many thousands of people came to visit the car when it was in the shops in Omaha.

Very soon, however, the car began to decline as private property. The elaborate interior could not make up for the notoriously rough ride, which was blamed on the sixteen-wheel undercarriage or the broad-tread wheels. About the same time the railroad acquired a new "directors' car" of elaborate construction and appointments. On trips over the road the directors used this car. The Lincoln car was then assigned as a special car, for the accommodation of government commissioners, military officers and other special parties, during the track construction period from 1866 to 1869. In this guise it reached the end of the track when construction was nearing Julesburg, Colorado on September 16, 1867.⁷⁹ No photographs have been found to show the car participating in the ceremonies of the Golden Spike near Promontory, Utah, in May 1869.⁸⁰ Finally, it was sidetracked and used by the Union Pacific division superintendents⁸¹ or section foremen⁸² to live in at work sites. Regarding this period, a president of the U. P. told a historical society years later

There does not seem to have been any particular sentiment about this car, and an opportunity to sell it to the Colorado Central Railroad Company was very gladly availed of in 1870...It was a cumbersome piece of

equipment and was not regarded with any favor by the U. P. people on that account.⁸³

While 1870 is the generally accepted date for the sale of the car to the Colorado Central, Professor Wesolowski has found sales documents dated 1874, much later than commonly understood.⁸⁴ Yet another account gives 1872 as the date when the car was stripped in Omaha, the equipment removed from it and the car turned over to the Operating Department and converted into a coach.⁸⁵

After some years as a passenger day coach around Denver on the Colorado Central, it was apparently demoted further. In 1878 when the U.P. absorbed the Colorado Central, the car came back to the U. P. as a construction car.⁸⁶ In 1886, it was a bunk car in a work train in Denver⁸⁷ on the Marysville branch of the U. P.—"a relic of faded gentility."⁸⁸ It was said to have been used as a dining car for the construction crew and as a carpenter's work car in the mountain division, which included Idaho and Montana.⁸⁹ By 1893, worn with age and abuse, it was in the Omaha yards a weather-beaten hulk with the windows boarded over.⁹⁰ The words "Colorado Central RR" above the windows and "Work Train" below the windows were said to be still readable at that time.⁹¹

Despite the ravages of rough usage, the car still commanded some appreciation. In April, 1886, U. P. President Charles Francis Adams inquired after the paintings that had been in the car, and indeed, that's where they were found, in the historic car now used as a bunk car of a work train in the Denver area. The paintings were taken out, carefully boxed and sent to Omaha,⁹² as noted earlier. In 1892 a company of men from New York sent an agent to Omaha with a proposal to purchase the car

so as to exhibit it at the World's Fair. Satisfactory terms could not be agreed upon and the project was abandoned.⁹³ There was talk of [U. P.] restoring it for the Columbian Exposition but the necessary \$5000 could not be found.⁹⁴ Nonetheless, Lincoln Lore and Borchers report that the car was refurbished and placed on exhibition by the Union Pacific at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair but that the reconditioning was not extensive.⁹⁵ After another five years of neglect, it was refurbished for exhibit in Omaha at the Trans-Mississippi Exposition, where it was reported to have been seen by 1,250,000 people and damaged considerably by souvenir-hunting vandals.⁹⁶ "In 1900, a group of [African American] citizens of the Omaha area proposed to have the city council appropriate money to secure the car and have it restored as nearly as possible to its original condition and to have it housed permanently in a special building. This movement was headed by Dr. M. O. Rickets, [an African American] physician. Mayor Moores, a Civil War veteran, looked upon the idea with favor, but these plans did not materialize."⁹⁷ Sidney King, in his 1903 statement, referred to reports that linked Booker T. Washington with such a plan.⁹⁸

THE CAR AS AN EXHIBITION 1903 - 1911

In 1903 came the Lincoln car's final humiliation. What remained of the vandalized car attracted the attention of a showman named Franklyn B. Snow, variously of St. Louis, Rock Island, and Peoria. For a price of \$2000⁹⁹ he purchased the car and some amount of the furniture and furnishings the U. P. still held, and arranged for an elaborate exhibit in the Lincoln Museum at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair. The \$15000 museum building was erected just north of the Illinois State Building and near the great

ferris wheel. The St. Louis Republic of May 1, 1904 made the following comments about the historic car:

Of all the interesting exhibits at the World's Fair, there is none that has created more general attention or is viewed with a greater affection and reverence than the old "Lincoln Car" since its arrival and installation in the Lincoln museum, World's Fair grounds. None of the visitors at the museum who have had the privilege of seeing this sacred relic go away without gazing at the old coach for some time with evident affectionate interest, and very few look at it save with uncovered heads.

Although the car now is in a dilapidated condition, plainly showing that it has been abandoned to the cold storms of winter and the sun's hot rays of summer for too many years, it is still the car that was used to bear the remains of President Lincoln from Washington, D. C. to Springfield, Ill. for interment. Time has made sad changes within and without. From a beautifully decorated exterior, its sides are cracked and weatherbeaten. Inside the several compartments, fine furnishings have been removed and the elegant crimson colored silk with which the entire insides were tufted and upholstered has been removed by the hands of vandals. Yet for all

of this it is the old private car of President Lincoln—the only coach ever built by the United States Government for the use of a president and cabinet. The visitors who see it recognize in it a national treasure of incomparable value and rich association.¹⁰⁰

After St. Louis, Snow exhibited the car in a number of cities across the country, publicizing its arrival each place with cannon shots, one for each letter of the president's name and one on each hour throughout the entire day.¹⁰¹ This cross-country carnival so horrified the growing band of Lincoln admirers that a group was organized to take the relic away from Snow. Advertising materials published by Snow were evident some decades ago in the collections of the Chicago Historical Society but currently can not be found.¹⁰² On October 5, 1905, an unidentified newspaper reported that the car was standing on a sidetrack in the Chicago and Alton Railway Yards at Joliet, Illinois, and had been offered to the Lincoln Park Commission of Chicago.¹⁰³

Following Snow's death in 1905, the car was auctioned at a creditor's sale to Thomas Lowry of Minneapolis for \$800.¹⁰⁴ Lowry was then president of the Minneapolis St. Paul & Sault Ste. Marie Railroad. He was also president of a combine which bought up the several street car lines of Minneapolis and St. Paul to form the Twin City Rapid Transit Company. Lowry was also involved in the sale of lots in Columbia Heights northeast of Minneapolis which he had recently platted as a new suburb, setting aside a sizeable tract as a park. Lowry brought the car as a gift to Minneapolis, and when the Minneapolis Park Board found that it could not furnish the imposing museum Lowry

had envisioned,¹⁰⁵ he moved it to his park at 37th Avenue Northeast and Quincy Street where visitors might be attracted to the end of his street car line, view the car and buy a lot for new home—"a drawing card to assist in the booming of the Heights" in the words of the St. Paul Pioneer Press. Lowry died in 1909. In the extended obituaries in the Minneapolis and St. Paul newspapers, there is strangely not a word about the car.¹⁰⁶

END OF THE HISTORY IN MINNEAPOLIS

The Columbia Heights development did not progress rapidly; six years later it was still sparsely settled territory. Then, on Saturday, March 18, 1911, a boy was burning brush and grass in the rear of a house at Thirty-fifth and Architect's avenue when the blaze, fanned by a high wind, got beyond his control and swept north through ten blocks of that territory. Other boys and some of the women of the neighborhood joined the fight against the flames. Their efforts were largely limited to preventing the fire from igniting houses and barns in the district bordering the fire-swept section. Most of the men who resided in Columbia Heights were in Minneapolis at work, but the chief of the Columbia Heights volunteer department organized the boys and women into fire fighting brigades. In the excitement, the Lincoln car had been forgotten. It was not until the flames were within a few feet of the inclosure which contained the car that the fire fighters realized that the car might be destroyed. The boys who had gathered to help save the car used blankets and coats in the fight, and for a time it was thought the car would be saved. One boy was burned about the hands and face; Another's clothes took fire and he was slightly burned. Engine company 15 was called but when the firemen arrived they found the shed which protected the car destroyed and the car in flames. The

firemen succeeded in checking the fire, but the car that had carried the body of Abraham Lincoln was a charred wreck. The manager of the Columbia Heights Land Company announced his intention to permit the public to take fragments of the car as souvenirs. Ironically, the car had recently been given by the heirs of Mr. Lowry to the Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs for the purpose of its removal to Mendota to be preserved...as part of a state historical museum. The removal was to have taken place the next summer.¹⁰⁷

The veneration that attended the car throughout its existence continues, perhaps not as a general attitude among the population, but among a group of specialists. Several museums keep articles of furniture and furnishings from the car, but the Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul where the car expired has no objects or pictures, nor traces of the pieces that the public was allowed to carry away as souvenirs. A dozen or more other museums and historical societies maintain files of clippings, photographs and other documents. Individuals have made a lifetime hobby of tracing the car's history. One of these was Frank W. Cornell of Lewiston, New York, who styled himself "Lincoln Car Researcher" and "The Lincoln Car Chaser" in letters to museums. Besides accumulating documents about the history of the car, he collected pictures of the car taken just after its completion which had been made into a memorial post card that was printed and distributed in the hundreds of thousands in August 1908. Less than a dozen of the cards seemed to have come to his attention.¹⁰⁸ Craftsmen in the Omaha Shops made a wooden model of the car adhering to the design of the car and its exterior appearance, from such records as were available, including pictures.¹⁰⁹ Another avid individual is Professor Wayne E. Wesolowski, Ph.D, of Illinois Benedictine

College, in Lisle, Illinois, whose thorough and resourceful research has brought him and the college library scores of carefully documented objects and painstakingly identified photographs of the car. The collection includes two of the memorial post cards sought by Cornell. Not content with collecting, Dr. Wesolowski has built an equally painstaking scale model not only of the car, but also of the locomotive that pulled its train from Cleveland to Columbus during its sole official trip.

This account would not have been possible without the enthusiastic cooperation of these individuals and the curators of the museums and historical societies. It can be a source of satisfaction to Alexandria to know of the serious attention still devoted to an important artifact that had its origin in the city.

APPENDICES

A. Reminiscences by Wm. H. H. Gould, "The Funeral Train of President Lincoln, The National Tribune, Wash, D. C. May 27, 1915.

B. Diary of Luther E. Bulck, noncommissioned officer of Company E, 9th Regiment, a member of the working guard of honor on the funeral train. Excerpts.

C. Railway itinerary and account of the funeral train's trip.

D. Eyewitness comments on the train's stop at Poughkeepsie, N. Y.

Mr. Slusser prepared this paper while a volunteer at the Alexandria Archaeology Center. The editor is indebted to Dr. Pamela Cressey, City Archaeologist, who brought it to his attention.

ENDNOTES:

1. National Archives, Military Records.
2. Reminiscences of General Haupt
3. W.H.H.Price, shop foreman, "Letter to the Omaha 'Bee'", 2/19/1897, quoted in Rigdon, p. 14.
4. Victor Searcher, Farewell to Lincoln, New York, Abingdon Press 1965, p. 87.
5. White p. 367 c. 1.
6. Raymond Borchers, "President Lincoln's Car," Lincoln Herald, Winter 1984 p. 212.
7. W.H.H.Price, "Letter of February 19, 1897" to the Omaha Bee.
8. quoted in John W. Starr, Jr., in Lincoln and the Railroads, Dodd Mead & Co., 1927, p. 276.
9. Lincoln Lore, The Lincoln National Life Foundation, May, 1957, p. 2.
10. Sidney D. King, assistant master car builder in the USMRR shops, quoted in TIES, Southern Railroad Magazine, 1951 p. 8
11. Lincoln Lore p. 2 c. 1.
12. Rigdon p. 14.
13. Lincoln Lore, p. 4 c. 1.
14. Lincoln Lore, May 1957, pp. 1-2,4; White, p. 1 c. 2.
15. TIES - Southern Railroad Magazine - 1951, "President Lincoln's Private Car," p. 7.
16. Lincoln Herald, p. 213.
17. White, p. 367, c. 2; W.H.H.Price, in Rigdon, p. 14.
18. Lincoln Lore, p.1.
19. John H. White, Jr., The American Railroad Passenger Car, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978, p.367.
20. Searcher, p. 88.
21. W.H.H. Price, quoted in Rigdon, p.15.
22. Lincoln Lore, p. 1, c.1
23. Borchers, p. 1.
24. Rigdon p. 20.
25. White p. 367.
26. White p. 367.
27. White, p. 367, c. 2.
28. Searcher p. 88.
29. King, White p. 367 c.2.
30. Rigdon, p. 17.
31. Lincoln Lore, p. 2, c. 1.
32. White p. 367 c. TIES p. 5 c. 2;

33. TIES, p. 5.
34. Lincoln Lore, p.2, c.1.
35. Borchers, p. 213.
36. Searcher, p. 89.
37. See: Searcher, pp. 54-64.
38. Searcher p. 175.
39. Missouri Historical Society, note March 20, 1957 quoting Baltimore and Ohio Magazine, February, 1941.
40. Borchers p. 213 c. 2.
41. Robert Lincoln, letter 2-23-1905.
42. TIES, p. 6 c. 2.; The Pullman News, Aug. 1928.
43. Wesolowski, ltr. 1-14-95 to Alex. Arch. ref. p. 6, ¶ 2.
44. Lincoln Lore, p.2.
45. Searcher, p. 89.
46. The National Tribune, Wash.D.C. May 27, 1915
47. Campbell, p. 70, in Bulletin No. 93, October 1955, of The Railway & Historical Society, Inc., Inc.
48. TIES, p.6.
49. Appendix D.
50. TIES, p. 6 c. 1,2.
51. Appendix B.
52. Wesolowski collection.
53. Borchers p. 214; Lincoln Lore, p. 2.
54. New York Times, June 25, 1865, p.4, col.5.
55. National Republican, April 25, 1865, in White p. 369 c. 1.
56. Lincoln Lore, p. 2, c. 2.
57. R.R.G., Aug. 27, 1886, p. 603, in White p. 369, note 208.
58. Rigdon, p. 5.
59. White p. 369 c. 1; Rigdon p. 5; Lincoln Lore, p.2 c.2; Borchers p. 214 c. 2.
60. Letter, Frank W. Cornell to FORD THEATRE, NHS, 17 February 1982.
61. Rigdon pp. 4-5.
62. Rigdon p. 18.
63. Rigdon pp. 6, 8, 10-11, 13.
64. Telephone conv., Ann Woodhouse, Dec. 1995.
65. Rigdon p. 21.
66. Nebraska State Historical Soc. ltr. to Alex. Arch. 1-27-95.

67. Rigdon p. 13.
68. Thomas E. Felt ltr April 22, 1958 to Missouri Historical Society and enclosed affidavit of F. F. Wadsworth, March 15, 1924, Denver, Colo.
69. Cornell, Frank W. ltr. 2-17-1982 to Ford Theater Museum.
70. White, telecon. 2-2-95.
71. Rigdon p. 10.
72. Cornell ltr. p. 2.
73. Lincoln Lore, p. 4 c. 1.
74. Snoddy ltr. December 10, 1991 to Alexandria Archaeology.
75. Rigdon p. 1.
76. Lincoln Lore, p. 4 c. 1.
77. Rigdon p. 18.
78. F.F. Wadsworth, affidavit 3-15-24.
79. Rigdon p. 1.
80. Wesolowski ltr.; Borchers p. 215 c. 1.
81. Lincoln Lore, p. 4 c. 1.
82. Rigdon p. 2.
83. Carl R. Gray, extemporaneous address to Newcomen Society, American Branch, c. 1935, set down from memory and printed 1937.
84. Wesolowski ltr. 10-25-1994.
85. Kragaskow, in Rigdon p. 20.
86. TIES, p. 9 c. 1.
87. Rigdon pp. 8,9.
88. Denver Tribune Republican quoted in Railroad Gazette, Aug. 27, 1886, p. 603, in White p. 369 c. 2.
89. Borchers p. 215 c. 1.
90. Lincoln Lore, p. 4 c. 1; Borchers p. 215 c. 2; White p. 369 c. 2.
91. Borchers p. 215 c. 2.
92. Rigdon p. 8.
93. Rigdon p. 2.; Lincoln Lore, p. 4 c. 1.
94. White p. 369 c. 2.
95. Borchers p. 215 c. 2.; Lincoln Lore, p. 4 c. 2.
96. Lincoln Lore, p. 4 c. 2.; White p. 369 c. 2.
97. Lincoln Lore, p. 4 c.2.
98. TIES, p. 7.
99. Rigdon p. 22.; Borchers p. 22.

100. Lincoln Lore, p. 4 c. 2.
101. *ibid.*
102. White p. 371 c. 1 and note 214.
103. Lincoln Lore, p. 4 c. 2
104. Borchers, p. 215, c. 2.
105. White p. 371, c. 1
106. Borchers pp. 215-216.
107. Minneapolis Sunday Journal, March 19, 1911.
108. Cornell, ltr. 2-17-1982 to Ford Theater, NHS; The Abraham Lincoln Railroad Funeral Car Postcard...1908, undated, 4 typed pages.
109. Rigdon p. 12.

WORKS CONSULTED

- Abdill, George B. Civil War Railroads. Seattle: Superior Publishing Co. [1961].
- Borchers, Raymond. "President Lincoln's Car." Lincoln Herald, Winter, 1984:212-216.
- Bulck, Sgt. Luther B. "With Lincoln On His Last Journey." Edited by Edward G. Longacre. Lincoln Herald, 84 (1982):239-241.
- Campbell, G. Murray. "The Lincoln Inaugural and Funeral Trains." Bulletin No. 93, Railway & Locomotive Historical Society, October, 1955:67-72.
- Gray, Carl R. The Lincoln Car on Union Pacific 1865. A Newcomen Address, 1937.
- McMurty, R. Gerald. "The Lincoln Funeral Car." Lincoln Lore, May, 1957:1-4.
- Nelson, David K. "A Rolling Memento." Civil War Times Illustrated, March/April 1995:54-59.
- Price, W.H.H. "The Private Car Built for President Lincoln, 1863-1865." Locomotive Engineering, September, 1893:415
- Rigdon, Paul. "The Lincoln Car," 23-page chapter of Union Pacific Historical Catalog. 13 vols., Typescript. Omaha: Union Pacific Historical Museum, 1952: 1225-1247.
- Searcher, Victor. The Farewell To Lincoln, New York--Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965.
- Starr, John William, Jr. Lincoln & the Railroads, New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1927.
- White, John H., Jr. The American Railroad Passenger Car, Baltimore, and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.

EDITOR: T. MICHAEL MILLER

EDITORIAL STAFF:

**MARILYN W. BURKE
ANNE S. PAUL**

The Alexandria Historical Society Inc., publishes **The Alexandria Chronicle** quarterly. It is mailed free to members. Annual dues: students, \$10.00; Single, \$20.00; Couple, \$30.00. A single subscription to **The Alexandria Chronicle** may be purchased for \$8.00 annually by writing to: The Editor, Alexandria Historical Society, 201 S. Washington Street, Alexandria, Virginia. 22314



ALEXANDRIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

201 SOUTH WASHINGTON STREET
ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA 22314

NON-PROFIT ORIG
U S POSTAGE
PAID
Alexandria, Va
Permit No. 622