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Anne Arundel County **HISTORY NOTES**

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Anne Arundel County History Notes

President Lincoln Comes to Annapolis

By
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Just recently, I obtained a letter written by Civil War soldier, Sgt. Benjamin F. Barrow of the 31st Maine Infantry, Company C. It was written while he was a patient at the Naval Hospital in Annapolis, Md. on February 5, 1865. In the letter Sgt. Barrow writes:

"This place has been the scene of considerable business the past week. The cold weather two weeks ago closed the Potomac and the harbor of Baltimore and vessels from all quarters have gathered here — Here is where Sec. Seward came to embark for City Point to meet the rebel peace Com. — He was followed the next day by Pres. Lincoln, who returned yesterday morning . . ."

For years, local historians have debated over the issue of President Lincoln visiting Annapolis. This letter, though, got my wheels spinning and I dug into the records for more information. On the internet I came across an article written by William C. Harris

entitled: *The Hampton Roads Peace Conference: A Final Test of Lincoln Presidential Leadership*. From this article and a few other sources I have come up with the following account of when Abraham Lincoln came to Annapolis:

After the election of 1864, President Lincoln desperately wanted to end the war. But he was frustrated in initiating any negotiations with the Confederacy. Jefferson Davis would accept only the recognition of the Confederate States of America and Lincoln feared that any effort by the Union to negotiate with the Confederacy might imply recognition of Southern independence. Several members of Lincoln's cabinet urged the president to initiate negotiations, not with Jefferson Davis, but with members of his government.

Seventy-three year old Francis Preston Blair, a retired political editor and resident of Silver

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President Lincoln (cont. from page 3)

Spring, Maryland met with the president and requested a pass through Union lines to visit Richmond. The request was granted supposedly to retrieve the personal papers seized by Confederate General Jubal Early's forces during their Maryland raid in the spring of 1864. Before traveling to Richmond, Blair wrote two letters to Jefferson Davis requesting a meeting. When Blair arrived in Richmond his request was honored by the Confederate president.

In his meeting with Davis, Blair outlined a proposal for peace negotiations. Davis agreed to appoint a delegation to meet with President Lincoln or his representatives for the purpose of ending the war.

Blair returned to Washington on January 16, 1865 with a letter from Davis indicating a willingness to initiate talks "with a view to secure peace to the two countries." The Blair mission led to the Hampton Roads Peace Conference held on February 3, 1865.

Davis sent his vice-president Alexander H. Stevens, Confederate Senator Robert M. T. Hunter and John A. Campbell, a former justice of the United States Supreme Court, to meet with Lincoln or his representatives at Hampton Roads, Virginia. Lincoln sent his Secretary of State William Seward to Fort Monroe, Virginia to meet with the Southern delegation. Generals Grant and George G. Meade met with the Southern commissioners before the official conference started. As a result of his discussions with the delegation, General Grant sent a message to Lincoln which stated that "I am convinced, upon conversation with Messrs. Stevens & Hunter that their intentions are good and their desire sincere to restore peace and union."

Lincoln felt he could not let pass this opportunity for peace and immediately, without consulting any of his cabinet, decided to join Seward at the peace talks. As the Potomac River was jammed with ice from a recent cold wave, Lincoln, with only one attendant, departed Washington on a special train to Annapolis. Upon arriving at the West Street terminal (where Lowe's Hotel is now located) Lincoln, with his one attendant, walked to Church Circle, down College Avenue and into the Naval Academy where the steamer *Thomas Colyn* was waiting for him. A correspondent of the *New York Herald*, reportedly by coincidence, was on board the *Thomas Colyer*, and he dispatched an account of the trip to Hampton Roads, which was published in the February 5, 1865 issue. Without delay the steamer left Annapolis and navi-

gated around the ice in the Chesapeake Bay and made its way south toward Hampton Roads arriving late that night.

The next morning Lincoln and Seward met with the Southern commissioners in the saloon of the steamer *River Queen*. The discussion was preceded by friendly reminiscences of former acquaintance and association, Lincoln responding to Stevens' remarks in a "cheerful and cordial manner." Lincoln was ready with his inevitable joke. Observing the slender Stevens removing his great coat and muffler, he remarked that the Georgian's was the "smallest nubbin to come out of so much husk that he ever beheld." His attempt at humor was apparently lost on Stevens as he later made no mention of the incident.

During the following discussions, Lincoln insisted on reunion of the Southern states and the abolition of slavery. He even offered to reimburse slaveholders for their loss, but the Southerners could not accept either reunion of the states or abolition of their slaves and after four hours of discussions the talks ended in failure.

Lincoln and Seward returned the next day by steamer to Annapolis and by rail to Washington. In Annapolis the president was greeted by reporters anxious to learn of the outcome of the conference. This time through Annapolis, the president was given a ride to the railroad terminal. ■

— IN MEMORIAM —

We report with regret the passing of long-time member James Shipley of Richmond, Virginia, and life member Angelina Jones of Crownsville. Our sympathy is extended to the families and friends of these fine people.