

Departure

On February 11, 1861, the day of departure had finally arrived for Abraham Lincoln. He woke early and left his hotel at seven-thirty on a gloomy morning, characterized by a wet chill that enveloped Springfield. After boarding a carriage, he was taken to the Great Western Railroad depot - a modest one-story structure. A crowd had gathered, estimates varying wildly from a few hundred to over a thousand onlookers. Notable figures, including sculptor Thomas D. Jones, described Lincoln's calm demeanor as he greeted friends and neighbors, with tearful farewells shared in a quiet atmosphere.

Lincoln soon boarded a specially appointed train for this first leg of his journey. Named "L. M. Wiley," the locomotive was built by Hinkley Locomotive Works in Boston. As Lincoln prepared for departure, he was joined by his eldest son, Robert, and several others, while Mrs. Lincoln and their younger sons planned to join him later in Indianapolis. In the growing rain, Mrs. Lincoln was brought closer to the platform by sculptor Jones to hear her husband's final remarks.

The train was ready to depart, steam pouring from the engine as Lincoln prepared to speak. Although there are various accounts of his words, Lincoln spoke from a place of deep emotion, expressing gratitude for his years in Springfield and sadness over the departure. He reflected on the sacred ties of family and community, mentioning the death of his second son, Edward. Stating that he owed all that he was to his friends in Springfield, he acknowledged the monumental task ahead, likening it to the challenges faced by George Washington and urging that they seek divine guidance together.

Witnesses noted the rain fell heavily as Lincoln, visibly emotional, spoke his goodbye, urging the crowd to pray for him as he departed. With heartfelt finality, he bid them farewell, leaving everyone in a somber mood as the train began its journey. It was a pivotal moment, marking not only Lincoln's departure from Springfield but also the beginning of a significant chapter in American history, as he headed toward Washington and his upcoming presidential inauguration .