

STATEHOUSE AS IT APPEARED ON THE DAY OF LINCOLN'S FUNERAL IN 1865

1865

VICTOR WHEELER

DRAPED HOME OF LINCOLN

FOR FUNERAL DAY

Member of Nevius Post Charged with Duty of Preparing State House and Home of Lincoln for the Funeral—Soldier of 146th Illinois Regiment, One of 30 Who Draped Illinois State House with Mourning and in Charge of the Work at the Home—Illustrations with this Article were Taken from Original Photographs now in his Possession—Rockford Company Followed Body to Tomb.

Victor Wheeler, member of Nevius Post, Grand Army of the Republic, and late of the 146th Illinois Infantry, is one Rockford man intimately connected with the funeral of President Lincoln who will always remember the scenes of sorrow at Springfield following the arrival of the body of the distinguished dead.

Mr. Wheeler as a boy of 16 years was stationed with his regiment on provost duty at Springfield April 14th, the day of the assassination, and was one of the two soldiers deputized to drape the Lincoln

home for the funeral. He followed the body to the vault at Oak Ridge and stood through the services and the long address of Bishop Simpson with its strong attack upon the confederate leaders.

Wheeler was one of the 30 men, including S. F. Baker, now of Santa Barbara, Cal., selected from the regiment for the duty of draping the state house in preparation for the reception of the remains. This work was begun several days after the death of Lincoln and only completed a day or two before the arrival of the body on the morning of May 3rd.

The decorating work around the dome of the state house, now the Sangamon county court house, was done by Mr. Wheeler and a companion who enlisted from Freeport, as they were the only two capable of working at so great a height. The streamers and rosettes placed by the local veterans can be distinctly seen in the accompanying illustration taken from a photograph now in the possession of Mr. Wheeler.

The Freeport soldier, known to Mr. Wheeler as "Ike," and whose name he believes to be Isaac Andrews, was also sent with the Rockford man to drape the Lincoln home in another part of the city, this honor being conferred upon them by the lieutenant in charge as a reward for their good work on the state building. This work was simply done, being completed in one day, and won the approbation of the chief of the citizens' committee. The home with its draping of black and white as it appeared on the day of the funeral is shown in the other illustration which was also taken from a photograph retained all these years by Mr. Wheeler.

Mr. Wheeler's remembrance of the events of those days is as perfect as though they occurred yesterday,

although he was but a youth at the time. He was born in Vermont, Sept. 10, 1847, and came to Rockford on his tenth birthday, residing here all the years since save for the time spent in the service of his country. He enlisted at the Holland House in this city August, 29, 1864, and left with his regiment the next day. He was mustered out of service on July 8, 1865.

The 146th regiment was detailed in company with one other regiment on duty in the city to meet the funeral train and escort the body to the catafalque in the state house, where it lay in state until the following day. Early in the morning of May 3rd the regiment was drawn up in expectation of the arrival of the train, which had started from Washington many days before and had been met with demonstrations of great sorrow at every city, town and hamlet through which it passed. Distinguished members of the senate and house, the cabinet and the army accompanied the body from the capitol to Springfield and were met by Mr. Wheeler's regiment at the station.

The body of President Lincoln was escorted to the state house and placed upon the magnificent catafalque in the representative chamber where it was first viewed by the soldiers of the 146th Illinois, who were allowed to march in two's through the chamber before the crowd was admitted. During the remainder of that day and on the following morning over two hundred thousand people viewed the remains.

On May 3rd Mr. Wheeler was one of the soldiers placed on guard about the state house. The following day the regiment followed the body to Oak Ridge, tramping with reversed arms to the funeral march.

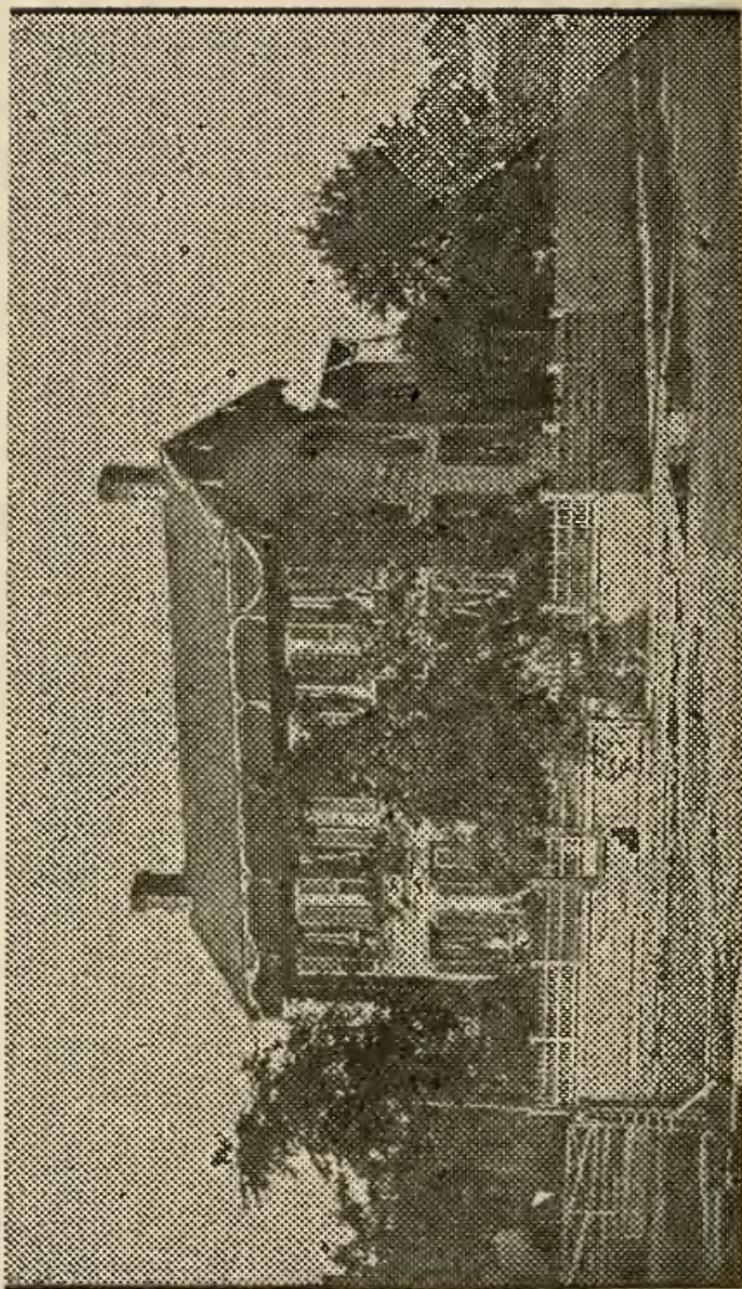
During the prayer by Rev. Albert Hale the soldiers remained at attention, but while the impassioned ad-

dress of Bishop Simpson was being delivered they took turns in visiting an adjacent spring and bringing water to the others in empty cartridge clips. After the benediction had been pronounced by Rev. P. D. Gurley the regiments returned to their camps in platoons, making a fine spectacle as they swung along the streets of Springfield. The 146th was reviewed on the parade grounds by Gen. Rosecranz the following day and complimented upon its appearance and skill.

A special hearse with six huge black plumes was used for the funeral, drawn by several span of black horses, each bearing a plume of sable hue. The funeral cortege was in eight divisions, including not only military bodies, but countless citizens who marched afoot. Gen. McGlernand was the marshal of the day and the parade was so long that less than half the divisions were in line when the hearse turned into the cemetery. The crowd, augmented by excursions from surrounding districts, was the greatest in the history of Springfield.

Mr. Wheeler had never seen the president in life, but states that the features he saw as the body lay in state seemed to him like those of an old friend, so frequently had he seen the various photographs of Lincoln. Later, on visits to Washington in attendance at Grand Army reunions, he took occasion to visit the scenes connected with the life and death of the martyred president.

Company B, to which Mr. Wheeler belonged, was organized in Rockford and contained a few men who are now residents of the vicinity and many who have been "mustered out" for the last time. From the Rockford Republic, Feb. 12, 1909.



HOME OF LINCOLN ON THE DAY OF FUNERAL