**"Northerner's Reaction to Lincoln's Assassination"**

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Date:

[**April 16, 1885**](http://historyengine.richmond.edu/search/dates/18850416)

Location:

[**DUTCHESS, New York**](http://historyengine.richmond.edu/fips/view/8788)

Tags:

[**Crime/Violence**](http://historyengine.richmond.edu/tags/view/1), [**Politics**](http://historyengine.richmond.edu/tags/view/18)

Course:

[**"Civil War and Reconstruction,"**](http://historyengine.richmond.edu/courses/view/18) [**Juniata College**](http://historyengine.richmond.edu/schools/view/3)

Benjamin Stouffer lived in Poughkeepsie, New York and attended school at the time of President Abraham Lincoln's assassination in 1865. In a letter back to his family in Franklin County, Pennsylvania, he described the feelings he had, and the reaction of the town concerning the unexpected death of the beloved president.

In the letter Stouffer writes that he did not know what to do when he heard of the assassination. He tells his sisters to stay strong back home, and reminds them that it was God's will for him to go. It seems as though Stouffer is trying to find a reason or explanation for Lincoln's death to deal with the mourning he is going through. Stouffer also describes the town of Poughkeepsie, which most likely had a similar atmosphere as many northern towns at the time of Lincoln's assassination. He wrote that nearly everyone wore black and white badges, and that the streets were filled with crape. He also noted that flags were flown at half mast, and were trimmed in black. Stouffer continues to give advice to his sisters in the letter, reminding them that no one knows when the son of God is coming back, hinting that they could die unexpectedly just as Lincoln had. He states, "God was ready to give him," referring to Lincolns untimely death. Stouffer finished the letter catching up on things like the news of his sister's new colt, the feelings of his uncle, and other small talk that would be discussed in a family letter.

Northern Whites were not the only group of Americans to mourn Lincoln's Assassination. Recently freed blacks saw Lincoln as their savior from slavery. Historian Benjamin Quarles described the black population as taking an immense blow, "Strong men cried without Shame," in Quarel's words. He went as far as writing that some blacks had felt that Booth had "crucified their Lord." Blacks in both the North and the South recognized that they had lost a leader that did invaluable things for them, and they mourned his death accordingly.

Although there was an intense mourning of Lincoln's death, not everyone in the country felt remorse over the assassination. Many southerners saw Lincoln as the cause for their most of their problems, and blamed him for the war and extreme destruction of their land and livelihoods. According to historian Michael Davis, some southern towns held meetings to endorse Booth's murder of Lincoln, and celebrate the deed. One Texan described the assassination as riding the world of, "A monster that disgraced the form of humanity."

Benjamin Stouffer's letter home shows one side of the reaction to President Abraham Lincoln's assassination in 1865. Although this reaction was widespread throughout a good deal of the North, it was obviously not held by everyone, notably much of the south. These differing views on Lincoln and his assassination were immense topics of controversy during that time, and feelings are still strong about the subject in the United States today.

**Citations**

* [**Benjamin Quarles Lincoln**](http://historyengine.richmond.edu/search/citation/43963), [***Lincoln and the Negro***](http://historyengine.richmond.edu/search/citation/43978) (New York: New oxford university press, 1962), 239-240.
* [**Michael Davis**](http://historyengine.richmond.edu/search/citation/43969), [***The Image of Lincoln in the South***](http://historyengine.richmond.edu/search/citation/43968) (Tennessee: Knoxville University of Tennessee Press, 1971), 101.
* [**Benjamin Stouffer**](http://historyengine.richmond.edu/search/citation/43975), [***Benjamin Stouffer to Family***](http://historyengine.richmond.edu/search/citation/43990) (http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/civwarlett-browse?id=F6510, April 16, 1865).

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| **The Civil War Ends - A Small Town's Reaction,**  **1865** |  |  |
|  | **T**he news of Lee's surrender at Appomattox on April 9 spread quickly through the North. The impact of the announcement on a small town in upstate New York was typical - a mixture of unbridled joy and sorrow for those who lost their lives in the conflict  Caroline Cowles Richards was a young woman of twenty-three living in Canandaigua, New York, a farming village in the state's Finger Lakes region. Caroline kept a diary of her daily experiences and reveals the sacrifices the community made as the war progressed. Many of its young men joined the Union Army and the villagers closely monitored the news from the war front. Sadly, a number of those who went off to war did not return, losing their lives on the battlefields of Gettysburg, the Wilderness, Spotssylvania, Petersburg and others. Caroline's diary was published in 1913.  **"..all the people seem crazy"**  *Caroline describes the scene as she awoke the day after Lee's surrender and is alerted to major news by the ringing of the church bells:*  "Monday Morning, April 10  'Whether I am in the body, or out of the body, I know not, but one thing I know,' Lee has surrendered! and all the people seem crazy in consequence. The bells are ringing, boys and girls, men and women are running through the streets wild with excitement; the flags are all flying, one from the top of our church, and such a 'hurrah boys' generally, I never dreamed of.  We were quietly eating our breakfast this morning about 7 o'clock, when our church bell commenced to ring, then the Methodist bell, and now all the bells in town are ringing. Mr. Noah T. Clarke (Principal of the local boys' school) ran by, all excitement, and I don't believe he knows where he is. No school to-day. I saw Capt. Aldrich passing, so I rushed to the window and he waved his hat. I raised the window and asked him what was the matter? He came to the front door where I met him and he almost shook my hand off and said, 'The war is over. We have Lee's surrender, with his own name signed.' I am going down town now, to see for myself, what is going on.  Later - I have returned and I never saw such performances in my life. Every man has a bell or a horn, and every girl a flag and a little bell, and every one is tied with red, white and blue ribbons. I am going down town again now, with my flag in one hand and bell in the other and make all the noise I can. Mr. Noah T. Clarke and other leading citizens are riding around on a dray cart with great bells in their hands ringing them as hard as they can. Dr. Cook beat upon an old gong.  The latest musical instrument invented is called the 'Jerusalem fiddle.' Some boys put a dry goods box upon a cart, put some rosin on the edge of the box and pulled a piece of timber back and forth across it, making most unearthly sounds. They drove through all the streets, Ed Lampman riding on the horse and driving it"  **Lincoln's assassination - "Oh, how horrible it is!"**  *The euphoria over the war's end was shattered just a few days later with the news of Lincoln's assassination.*  "April 15.-  The news came this morning that our dear president, Abraham Lincoln, was assassinated yesterday, on the day appointed for thanksgiving for Union victories. I have felt sick over it all day and so has every one that I have seen. All seem to feel as though they had lost a personal friend, and tears flow plenteously.  How soon has sorrow followed upon the heels of joy! One week ago tonight we were celebrating our victories with loud acclamations of mirth and good cheer. Now every one is silent and sad and the earth and heavens seem clothed in sack-cloth. The bells have been tolling this afternoon. The flags are all at half mast, draped with mourning, and on every store and dwelling-house some sign of the nation's loss is visible.  Just after breakfast this morning, I looked out of the window and saw a group of men listening to the reading of a morning paper, and I feared from their silent, motionless interest that something dreadful had happened, but I was not prepared to hear of the cowardly murder of our President. And William H. Seward, too, I suppose cannot survive his wounds. (Seward did survive)  Oh, how horrible it is! I went down town shortly after I heard the news, and it was wonderful to see the effect of the intelligence upon everybody, small or great, rich or poor. Every one was talking low, with sad and anxious looks. ...I trust that the men who committed these foul deeds will soon be brought to justice."  **References:**     Richards, Caroline, Village Life in America 1852-1872 (1913).  How To Cite This Article:  "The War Ends - A Small Town's Reaction, 1865" EyeWitness to History, www.eyewitnesstohistory.com (2004). |  |