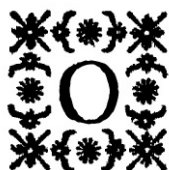


FROM
LINCOLN TO WASHINGTON:
A
PRESIDENTS DAY
RETROSPECT



ONE AUTUMN AFTERNOON IN 1864, a 10-word telegram from Philadelphia reached the White House: "George Washington made the Republic. Abraham Lincoln will save it."

Among Lincoln's papers there were many such messages. Earlier that year, another admirer wrote, "I would hope sincerely that the same overruling guidance and wisdom which was with our Immortal Washington may be vouchsafed to you."

Americans had begun to revere their 16th commander-in-chief as they did their first. Lincoln, who set Washington among "the pillars of the temple of liberty," may have been a bit abashed.

In the first year of his administration, the Illinois rail-splitter directed that the Virginia planter's birth be commemorated with readings of the Farewell Address. At the outset of the Civil War, no one supposed, least of all Lincoln, that he would ever share the day's honors.

Today's Presidents Day derives, of course, from the dual celebration of their birthdays. History forges its own connections.

Indeed, by War Order No. 1, Lincoln designated the anniversary of Washington's birth for a general attack on the Confederacy. No one missed the allusion he intended by the date.

Certainly it was apparent in a dusty, Virginia hamlet, a village from which Washington had sallied with his first militia commission, a town a sortie away from a coiled Federal Army, the place called

Williamsburg, a community caught again in the march and counter-march of history.

Williamsburg had been a colonial capital; the heir of Jamestown; the parent of Yorktown. In Williamsburg were shaped the ideas and careers of Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe. In Williamsburg a state legislature first proposed independence — on the motion of Richard Henry Lee, the kinsman of Robert E. Lee. It was the Civil War general's father, Congressman "Lighthorse" Harry Lee, once adjutant to Washington, who coined the phrase, "First in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen."

Lincoln spoke of "the patriots of seventy-six" as "a forest of giant oaks." He was humbled to be compared with them. In November 1864, he learned that one of the last survivors of that era, 104-year-old John Phillips of Massachusetts, "a Democrat, of the Jeffersonian School; voted for Washington, as President of the United States; and, yesterday, voted for your re-election." Lincoln was grateful for the compliment. To Phillips he wrote: "It is not for myself only, but for the Country which you have in your sphere served so long and so well, that I thank you." Lincoln valued the sacrifices of that generation, and hoped its history would be "recounted, so long as the bible shall be read."

Today in Colonial Williamsburg's Historic Area, the restoration of the 18th-century city, such passages in the lives of the men and the women, slave and free, black and white, the sentences that compose the story of the nation are still recounted, still read, where the first of them were set down, written in "America. Chapter I."

AMERICA. CHAPTER I.

Colonial Williamsburg

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