

## Preface (Stage Notes)

The title of this play, “*To Bind Up the Nation’s Wounds*,” was derived from Abraham Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address, delivered on March 4, 1865. This phrase set the tone for what Lincoln hoped to accomplish in his second term as President of the United States. Lincoln hoped to offer the vanquished Confederacy generous peace terms so that once the South surrendered, it could be restored to the Union as quickly as possible, avoiding lasting bitterness or the temptation to engage in guerilla warfare for generations to come. Tragically, Lincoln’s dream for “*a just and lasting peace*,” was cut short by the fanatical, misguided actions of John Wilkes Booth in Ford’s Theatre, only to be replaced with a vengeful Reconstruction policy, dictated by those in power as a way to punish the South for its insubordination.

This is not the story of Lincoln’s assassination; although there is foreshadowing of his final fate found throughout the drama. Lincoln’s greatness and enduring legacy as a humanitarian did not originate in the way he died, but rather in the way he lived his life. His sense of justice and compassion, coupled with a genuine sense of honesty and humility, as well as an abiding faith in the good sense of the common people, were all qualities that marked him as a great leader, even among his contemporaries. Lincoln’s decisions and actions made during the last few weeks of his life, as described in the play, were some of the most critical ones of his entire career; they were the manifestation of these same character traits.

While there were many who did not appreciate Lincoln until long after his death, there were others who did almost immediately. One journalist who witnessed Lincoln’s entry into Richmond on April 4, 1865, recalled: “He came not as a conqueror, not with bitterness in his heart, but with kindness. He came as a friend, to alleviate sorrow and suffering—to rebuild what has been destroyed.”<sup>3</sup> There were even favorable comments made about Lincoln from the most unlikely source, the former Confederacy itself. For instance, a Virginia farmer, reading of Lincoln’s assassination in the local newspaper, made the comment, “the South has lost its best friend.” He must have believed Lincoln truly meant what he said in his Second Inaugural Address in order to make such a remarkable statement. Such a respect for the man [Lincoln] deserves closer examination, using theatre to bring him and the historical personalities who were with Lincoln in those last, momentous days, back to life.

Whenever possible, direct quotations were used in constructing the dialogue between characters, to give the audience both an accurate and objective portrayal of Lincoln as possible. Complete citations and a full bibliography ensure authenticity. Within the play, there are numerous stage directions indicated by *[italics]* to aid in directing the production. The intention of the author was not either to put Lincoln on a pedestal or to criticize him as many of his biographers have done. It is left up to the individual audience member to decide for himself whether or not Lincoln deserves his reputation as a peacemaker, after seeing the play.

Although Lincoln was the central figure in the drama; it is told through the eyes of his faithful bodyguard (William Crook), through the eyes of his military officers (Grant, Sherman, Admiral Porter) and through the eyes of his family members (Mary Todd, Robert and Tad). Of all the characters, Tad grew the most in his appreciation for his father. A strong argument can be made that Tad was actually the play’s central figure. When he boarded the *River Queen* in Washington to accompany his father on Lincoln’s historic trip to visit General Grant at City Point, Virginia, Tad was accurately depicted as a sheltered, self-absorbed, headstrong, little boy of eleven. By the time he celebrated his twelve birthday on April 4, 1865 (the day Lincoln entered

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<sup>3</sup>Harold Holzer, “*When Lincoln and Son Came to Richmond*,” Brochure, (United States Historical Society), 2003.

Richmond for the first time), Tad had already grown considerably in his mental outlook, with even more lessons to learn. It was no accident that Tad was given the final spotlight in the play; his dialogue not only brought it to a natural conclusion, but it also showed how much he had matured. In a sense the audience is a lot like Tad, because it too must struggle with preconceived notions of who Father Abraham really was and what he means to them. Every audience member has been a child at one time or another; each one can readily identify with Tad. Children are great teachers because their struggles to find the meaning of life are both transparent and heartwarming. Sometimes children speak without thinking, because their innocence has not been stifled by carefully chosen words meant to blunt their meaning. Children can be brutally honest at times, but unlike many adults, who often mask their true emotions; children's thoughts are genuine. Lincoln himself understood this; that was one of the reasons his relationship with his son Tad was so strong. That relationship was described by at least one observer in this way. "I believe he [Tad] was the best companion Mr. Lincoln ever had—one who always understood him, and whom he always understood."

I was inspired to write this play from a recent trip I took to Richmond, Virginia, to commemorate the 141<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the end of the American Civil War. While in the former Confederate capital, I was shown a statue of Lincoln and Tad sitting on a bench on the grounds of the former Tredegar Ironworks, now the site of a National Park Service visitor center. Behind the seated figures was a wall inscribed with the closing words of Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address. The statue of Tad looking up at his father with a profound sense of wonder and respect made the familiar phrase, "*to bind up the nation's wounds,*" come alive for me. These same words were deliberately chosen to be the title of this play. It was as if I was seeing Lincoln again for the first time through the eyes of a little boy. By using Tad as a main character, I have tried to put into words for my audiences what the sculptor did for me through his art. It is my sincere hope that my efforts are as successful as his have been.

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