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“The long agony is over, Abraham Lincoln is inaugurated President of these United States!”

## A Vermonter Describes the Mood At Lincoln’s First Inaugural

CHARLES MARSHALL STONE of St. Johnsbury wrote the following letter to his wife, Sarah Fairbanks Stone, on March 4, 1861. Stone was in Washington, D. C., on that day to witness the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln as 16th President of the United States. His letter captures the mood of uncertainty and crisis facing the American people on the eve of civil war.

Stone was born in Lyndon, Vermont, on April 18, 1833. He was educated in the Lyndon schools and at St. Johnsbury Academy. He began an apprenticeship at the *Caledonian* in 1849 and purchased a half interest in that newspaper in July, 1855. In 1857 he purchased a full interest and continued as editor until 1889. He died the following year.

In 1858 he married Sarah Fairbanks, daughter of Governor Erastus Fairbanks. Four children were born to them: Mary E., Arthur F., Emily, and Philip H.

The original copy of this letter is in the possession of Miss Laura Stone, a granddaughter of Charles Marshall Stone, who is living in the home of T. F. Stone, a grandson of C. M. Stone, in Laguna Beach, California.

The reference to “these Baltimore rowdies” in the final paragraph pertains to a band of Southern sympathizers who stoned troops from Massachusetts as they marched through Baltimore on their way to Washington shortly before the Inaugural. The reference to “Howard” in the final sentence is probably to T. N. Howard of St. Johnsbury, a friend.

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Opposite Willard’s Hotel  
Washington, March 4, 1861

My Dear Sarah:

The long agony is over, Abraham Lincoln is inaugurated President of these United States! I have just returned from the ceremony, and you

may believe my physical system is glad that it is over. It was a terrible jam, but I went with the Vermont delegation, which was assigned an excellent place. We were quite near the stand of the President, but of course had a *standing ticket*, and were continually annoyed by having our ranks jostled and crowded by the "roughs," and by others. There was no accident or a special disturbance that I am aware of, though I presume the telegraph has announced a good many; and there may have been some—very likely there were.

It was a most glorious occasion. The weather, which today has been threatening, came off beautiful just as the procession was forming, and remained so until after the ceremonies were over; but now it is clouded up, and there are appearances of rain. The inaugural address was splendid, and delivered in fine style, and I judge it will have an excellent effect upon the country; though everything in relation to peace and union looks dark here now. Men are fearful that Virginia and Maryland will now secede; but I hope not.

I would speak to you in this of the grand pageant and military display of today, but you will get a better idea of it in the *Tribune* and *Journal*. Gen'l Scott has done everything to guard against surprise. A very large military escort accompanied the procession and stood guard about the Speaker's Stand and Capitol. The carriage containing the President-elect and Buchanan was escorted in a hollow square completely surrounded by cavalry.

As we returned from the Inauguration to our hotel, we shunned the great crowd on Pennsylvania Avenue and came around by the City Hall where we found the light artillery with six horses attached to each cannon, and a man to each *near horse*, ready to spring into the saddle at a moment's warning. In five minutes after word should be given those cannons could have been placed in the Capitol grounds doing execution. I saw this Company reviewed Friday, and it was almost amazing to see the rapidity of movement. The cannons were taken from one part of the field to another with those horses upon the gallop, and it was not half a minute after the horses stopped before they were detached from the carriages and the guns were loaded and fired. There were soldiers now in every part of the city, much to the annoyance of the secessionists.

I presume I have wearied you by this lengthy story, a much better one you probably read Wednesday night. (I suppose this will reach you Thursday), but all our party were out but me, and as I was too tired to move, I thought I would relieve the tedium and drive away the blues by talking awhile with you. We might, by great exertion, have probably got away on the 3 o'clock train to Phila. tonight; but the train was

shockingly overloaded, and aside from the danger of riding on such crowded trains, it was supposed that these Baltimore rowdies would return at this time, and from *such* company deliver us! The next through train to Philadelphia leaves at 6 in the morning, and that is so early your brothers proposed to take the one which leaves at 7:40, bringing us to Philadelphia, if we make time, at 3 P.M. So I hope my next will be dated at The Continental House. It would be a great luxury to even think we should be there *tonight*. It is pretty tough staying here so long. The beds are as hard as boards, and there is such a hubbub in the avenue that it is impossible to sleep. I must here tell you that I have been away from home eight days and have received but one letter from you—but I don't believe that is your fault, for you know that these eight days seem like eight *weeks* to me. Howard has come in, and we are planning about getting home, so I bid you Good-Night, again.

Marshall

P. S. I wrote Father a letter about the length of this.