"I Slept With Lincoln"

Lucien S. Hanks' Nighttime Experience

BY LUCIEN S. HANKS
REPORTED BY FRED L. HOLMES

bank, which was the first state bank organized in Wisconsin under the general banking law of 1852. In 1865 he was elected cashier and subsequently vice-president. In 1890 he was chosen president and held this position until his retirement in 1920.

By Lucien S. Hanks

Well do I remember, when a youth of twenty-one, I first saw Abraham Lincoln—and tried to sleep with him. I could not forget the incident though I was to live to be the age of Methuselah. It is more than sixty-five years ago and yet the event is as indelibly imprinted upon my memory as it was the day of its occurrence.

It was in the autumn of 1859 at the home of my uncle, William M. Tallman, at Janesville, Wisconsin. I was staying there at the time with his son Edgar, a boy a year older than I, and visiting a good deal with his sister "Gussie," about my own age. It was one year after the Lincoln-Douglas debates and Mr. Lincoln had come to Janesville, returning from the State Fair at Milwaukee, to speak on political issues of the day. As I now recall, it was his last visit to Wisconsin.

Mr. Lincoln was a guest at the Tallman home and I remember the impressions when I first met him. He was in the house talking with Mr. Tallman, a well-to-do and prominent lawyer of Southern Wisconsin. When I entered the room and saw him I thought to myself, "What a homely cove he is," an expression the boys used at that time. "This is Master Hanks," said Mr. Tallman in introducing me.

"Hanks! That's a name familiar to me, my boy," responded Mr. Lincoln. I did not understand what he meant by referring so intimately to the name of "Hanks," but I afterward learned that it was also the name of his mother's family. So far as I know, however, the two families were not related.

Probably it was because of his homely countenance that I remember so vividly his appearance. On that occasion Mr. Lincoln wore a black frock coat, dark stock tie, black vest, chaps, boots with double soles and his feet were as big as an elephant's. He wore a black slouch hat. I do not know what he carried in the old-fashioned carpetbag he had with him, but one thing was a nightshirt, which he wore that night when I tried to sleep with him. He was scrupulously clean in his personal habits and appearance.

There are some other incidents of that evening which I recall. Sometime after the introduction I remember that Aunt Emeline told me I would have to sleep on the sofa that night because of visitors. I had thought the remark had passed unnoticed by others. But when Mr. Lincoln got back from his speech that evening, he touched Aunt Emeline on the shoulder and said: "The boy and I will get along together all right; he and I will sleep together." He had evidently overheard what Aunt Emeline had said to me earlier in the evening.

Before the speech Mr. Lincoln visited with the entire family. During the early evening "Gussie" and her mother went into the parlor and "Gussie" sat down on the sofa. Soon Mr. Lincoln went into the parlor and I followed, because I wanted to be near the girl, she was so beautiful, and I was in love with my cousin. Mr. Lincoln bowed to the mother and then sat down on the sofa, beside her.

"Now Miss Tallman, I want you to tell me about your beau," he said.

"But I haven't any," she quickly responded.

"Are you sure you are telling me the truth?" asked Mr. Lincoln turning toward me with questioning eyes. What a moment that was to me!

In those days the Tallman home was one of the finest residences in Southern Wisconsin. It had been erected early in the fifties from pressed brick brought from Milwaukee. The rooms were large and the house was handsomely furnished. At one side of a wide hallway at the entrance were the sitting and dining rooms and
across the hall was a drawing-room, used only on occasions.

The evening of the visit, while we were chatting in the drawing-room, Mr. Lincoln faced the sitting room and I could see that he was interested in the next room. Finally he spoke what was in his mind.

"Mrs. Tallman, may we sit in the other room?" he asked. The suggestion pleased her. He evidently had the habit of making people feel at home with him. Soon it was time for the address.

Not being particularly interested in politics at that time I did not hear the speech. There was a dance in one of the neighboring houses and I went to that instead. It was about 11 o'clock when I came back. Lincoln had returned and was talking intently with Mr. Tallman. I went to bed—no one paid any attention to me.

I lay at the back of the room, and believe that I went to sleep. Though I was awakened when Mr. Lincoln came in about midnight I pretended to be asleep. He undressed quickly and came to bed. For about ten or fifteen minutes he was quiet and apparently went right to sleep. He seemed very uneasy. Soon he gave vocal evidences of slumber. His body jerked and twitched spasmodically, and often he touched me. His long legs would be kicking around, the subconscious effect probably of his vigorous speech but an hour or two before. He and Mr. Tallman were strong abolitionists and perhaps their conversation before going to bed had made him nervous. He was very restless. There was simply no sleep whatever for me. I could stand it no longer. I slipped out of bed and went into the hall, where I slept on a sofa the remainder of the night. Lincoln never knew when I left.

In the morning a humorous incident occurred. At the end of the hall, near the stairway leading to the second floor, was a closet supplied with slippers. Everyone was expected to exchange his shoes for slippers before going to bed. By oversight Mr. Lincoln had not been informed of this custom and wore his boots to his room and then set them outside the door. Next morning he was late in coming down. It was nearing train time. Edgar was finally told to call him, but, as he started, Lincoln entered the sitting room. I can see him now. He was minus boots—his blue yarn stockings with white tips being plainly in evidence. Turning to Mrs. Tallman, he smilingly declared:

"I can't accuse you, but I have no boots."

Aunt Emeline was a bit mortified. Finding the boots at his door, the janitor had taken and cleaned them, but returned them to the downstairs closet. Lincoln sat down in the sitting room and pulled them on before the entire family.

I went by way of Washington in the autumn of 1863 to visit with Edgar Tallman and then on to my old home at Hartford, Connecticut. While in Washington I met President Lincoln on the street. I knew him the moment I saw him: he was such a homely looking fellow I could not forget him. President Lincoln apparently recognized me as someone he had seen before and stopped.

"I am Hanks, the fellow who tried to sleep with you," I said coming up and shaking his hand. Lincoln laughed, declared that he remembered the incident, and invited me to visit him. But I was in such a hurry to get back to my old home that I did not seize this opportunity.

I was shocked and pained less than two years after when I read in the papers that he had been cruelly assassinated.