

Rose Whipp Northrup (1850-1944)

“Silverhair,” that’s what Lincoln called her.

Rose Whipp Northrup was born on September 27, 1850 in Beardstown, Illinois and grew up in Springfield, IL where her family lived on the same block as the Lincolns. Rose’s father was assistant state treasurer and worked in the Illinois State House where Lincoln spent much time as a lawyer. Rose sometimes went to work with her father where she would play with Lincoln’s youngest son, Thomas, called Tad. They became great friends and would often chase each other down the halls of the State House. Rose later recalled that she would run in and out of Lincoln’s office as if she were his own child. Lincoln was well known to have enjoyed children, and let his boys and their friends have free reign in his office. Lincoln would put Rose on his lap, pat her blond hair and call her “Silverhair.”

After Lincoln became president, Rose’s family moved back to Bloomington, where her father again became a banker. Rose later recalled the day her family received the news that Lincoln had been assassinated. Rose was about 15 years old at the time. She came home and found her mother crying. “They have assassinated our dear president,” her mother told her.

Lincoln was shot on Good Friday, April 14. The people in Bloomington didn’t hear the news until Saturday. The next day, Easter Sunday, nearly 7,000 people gathered downtown on the courthouse square for an “indignation” meeting. Rose recalled as she and her mother approached the square, seeing hundreds of people streaming in that direction. Jesse Fell, Asahel Gridley and Leonard Swett made speeches of outrage at what had happened to Lincoln. Lincoln had been so well known and so well liked that he was regarded as a fellow citizen here. The *Pantagraph* wrote, “His death seemed to fall with most crushing severity upon the people of McLean County.”

Rose also remembered that one man at the meeting who had just heard of Lincoln’s death threw his hat in the air and shouted something like “hurrah!” The crowd of people around him went mad with anger hearing his cheers, and set out to hang him. He was only saved when a few calmer people spirited him away in a carriage heading out of town.

Five days later, Lincoln’s funeral train left Washington headed for Springfield. It passed through 15 states and 180 towns. After nearly two weeks, the train arrived in Bloomington for the final leg of its journey. The people of Bloomington/Normal had erected giant funeral arches to span the railroad tracks. Between 3,000 to 4000 mourners gathered at the station to greet the train. Other area residents lined the tracks on the route to Springfield. Still others, including Rose, her father and uncle, and at least 1000 other Bloomington citizens, had chosen to travel to Springfield to attend the funeral.

In 1877, Rose married Charles Northrup. Originally from Lisle, New York, Charles had come West, and as Lincoln had done in New Salem and Allen Withers had done in Bloomington, found work as a clerk in a dry good store. *The Daily Pantagraph* recorded

news of their wedding, along with a list of wedding guests and the gifts they brought. One of those gifts included was a case of silverware from the congregation of Second Presbyterian Church where both the newlyweds were active members.

Later, Charles established his own store, and became a well known and highly respected merchant in McLean County. He operated his store for 32 years until his retirement. *The Daily Pantagraph* also wrote of Rose that she was “held in high esteem for her womanly virtues and her natural gifts and accomplishments.” It also reported that she held a “leading place among the singers of the city, and with a disposition as sweet as her voice, which has drawn her many warm friends and admirers.”

Rose had a long life full of both joys and sorrows. She and Charles had four children. Sadly, her eldest son, Fred, died in a gunshot accident while on a camping trip with friends. He was only 19.

Rose led a quiet life in her older years. She gained fame locally in 1938 and again in 1942 when *The Pantagraph* interviewed her about her memories of Lincoln and the meeting here in Bloomington. On July 23, 1944 she died quietly at Brokaw Hospital. She was 93.

**Discussion Question: What insights into Abraham Lincoln’s personality can you gain from this story?**