

President Arthur's visit attracted a thousand onlookers

Through the years Bloomington has had its share of prominent visitors. Presidential candidates who made whistle stops during their campaigns, could draw crowds at the station downtown.

Chester A. Arthur's brief visit here on Aug. 2, 1883, attracted plenty of enthusiastic people, according to the *Bloomington Telephone*. The visit was reported in the Aug. 5 edition.

President Arthur was on his way to Chicago and arrived here 11:10 a.m. "Fully a thousand people were at the depot to greet the distinguished passengers," explained the newspaper.

Someone with an eye on the next election had decorated the train. The *Telephone* described it for the benefit of those who didn't happen to be there. "The train was elaborately decorated with bunting and flags, said to be equal to any that ever passed through Indiana. ... The cab contains the name of Chester A. Arthur on either side, and the monogram above the roof." There were also floral decorations in the shape of a crown and a star.

Those who accompanied may have been



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

just as interesting to the crowd as the president, himself. Two of his traveling companions were U.S. Secretary of State Charles J. Folger and the Secretary of War, Robert T. Lincoln, son of President Lincoln.

The presidential party stepped out on the platform of the train to say a few words to the crowd. Continued the newspaper account, "President Arthur stepped to the front, facing to the east, with a bouquet in his hand, dressed in a black suit, and simply thanked the citizens for the honor of meeting them." (It was Mrs. Harmon Friedley who presented President Arthur with the bouquet. Her daughter, Clara, and Lettie West, who lived in Bedford, gave other men "button-hole bouquets.")

The secretary of the treasury (Folger) was

next introduced. The newspaper described him as "a heavy set man, short beard covering his face, sandy like."

Abraham Lincoln's son must have been of interest to the crowd. The *Telephone* also described him. "He is short and heavy set; black beard covering his face and has black eyes."

The third member of the president's party was particularly interesting, since in a sense it was a homecoming for him. That man was Walter Q. Gresham, a former IU student at Indiana University who had received an honorary doctor of laws degree. He was included in the party, because he was the postmaster general of the United States.

The *Telephone* shared that moment with its readers. "Postmaster General Gresham was last introduced as 'one of our citizens,' and after thanking the people, recognized and shook hands with several on the depot platform the he could reach. ... He is tall, rather slender, has a keen pair of black eyes, and his face is covered with a black beard."

The crowd had no way of knowing it, but Gresham was a future U.S. secretary of state.

He served during the Grover Cleveland administration.

Introductions and handshakes aside, the stop lasted only about three minutes, according to the newspaper. The president's party was running behind schedule because of previous stops at Salem, Mitchell and Bedford.

On Aug. 11 the *Telephone* reported that the run from Bloomington to Lafayette took 45 minutes. Their stop there lasted 10 minutes, because at that point the engine was changed.

President Arthur received a floral arrangement from a delegation of black citizens. He was praised by a spokesperson, the Honorable W.S. Lingle, who reminded the crowd that Arthur had taken to the Supreme Court a case of a black woman's civil right. (The case involved her not being permitted to ride on a streetcar.)

Were Bloomingtonians blasé about political visitors? Perhaps. After all, through the years they had the opportunity to see the likes of Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft and William Jennings Bryan.

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