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FATHER OF THE NATION'S SIXTEENTH PRESIDENT

by Robert W. Sterling, Editor

I. The Virginia and Kentucky Years, 1778-1816

Thomas Lincoln, the father of the sixteenth President, was born six generations after the first Lincoln arrived on colonial shores.[1] The Lincoln family was of English origin, and the family name dates back to Roman Britain.[2] Today, a monument at the home of kinsman Richard Lincoln, near the small village of Swanton Morley, testifies to the Lincolns' English ancestry.[3] The first American Lincoln progenitor was Samuel, who migrated from Hingham, England to Hingham, Massachusetts in 1637.

Thomas Lincoln's father, Abraham, was born in 1744. Between 1765 and 1768, he moved his family from Pennsylvania to Rockingham County, Virginia. Settling within the fertile Shenandoah Valley, the Lincolns established their home in the Linville Creek neighborhood, becoming prosperous and respected farmers. In 1770, Abraham married Bathsheba Herring and settled near his parents' farm.[4] It was here at the Linville Creek farm that their five children—Mordecai, Josiah, Mary, Thomas and Nancy—were born. Thomas, the third son and fourth child, was born on January 6, 1778.

The first four years of Thomas' childhood were spent on the Rockingham County farm; in 1782, the family moved into the wilderness of the Kentucky Territory. Abraham sold the Virginia farm and used the proceeds to purchase over 1,000 acres in Jefferson and Lincoln Counties, Kentucky.[5] He left the security of his Virginia farm, in part, because pioneering was in the Lincoln family's blood, a trait later apparent in his son, Thomas. In the direct line back to Samuel Lincoln (from Hingham, England) only his son, Mordecai, died in the same locality in which he was born. Mordecai, Jr. was born in Massachusetts and died in Pennsylvania; his son John was a native of New Jersey and died in Virginia; Abraham, Thomas Lincoln's father, was born in Pennsylvania and died in Kentucky; and Thomas, a native of Virginia, died in Illinois.[6]

The Lincolns migrated from Virginia via the Cumberland Trail and experienced both the physical discomforts of the frontier and the ever-present danger of Indian attack. The more fertile soil of the Long Run farm in

Jefferson County and its proximity to the protection of the Hughes Station blockhouse convinced Abraham to move his family once again in 1784. This second Lincoln farm was located a few miles east of present-day Louisville. Here, for the next two years, Abraham Lincoln constructed a cabin, farmed, and cleared land.

In May, 1786, tragedy struck the Lincoln family. Eight-year-old Thomas witnessed his father's death.[7] While working in the field, Abraham was struck down by a musket ball fired by a marauding Indian. Brother Josiah, 13 years-old, ran to nearby Hughes Station for help. As the Indian approached young Thomas, Mordecai slipped into the unfinished cabin, secured a musket, and killed the Indian. Abraham was 42 years-old when he was killed. Bathsheba, now alone, assumed the burden of raising five children.

Because Abraham died without a will, the law of primogeniture entitled the eldest son, Mordecai, to his father's holdings. Ironically, the Virginia General Assembly, as administrator of the Kentucky Territory, had repealed the ancient law a year prior to Abraham's death. However, the new law, which provided equal portions to all heirs, did not go into effect until nine months after Abraham's death, depriving Thomas of a considerable inheritance.[8] It is not known what portion of the estate Mordecai passed on to his younger brother.

Six months after her husband's death, Bathsheba left Hughes Station and took up residence at Beech Fork, Washington County. As a young boy, Thomas worked as a laborer for many farmers in the area, including his brother Mordecai. Here, too, he mastered the skills of a blacksmith and carpenter in the shop of a neighbor, Richard Berry, Jr.[9]

Thomas served in the county militia for three months during 1795, although but seventeen years of age.[10] The following year he struck out on his own. Traveling south, Thomas went to stay with his grandfather's cousin, Hannah Lincoln, who lived in Hardin County, Kentucky, near Elizabethtown. He secured temporary employment digging a raceway for the mill of Samuel Haycraft.[11] The pay was approximately three shillings a day, an average rate for the time. He also worked on the farm of his Uncle Isaac in Eastern Tennessee, but returned to his mother's Beech Fork cabin in 1799.[12] By 1801 all the Lincoln children had married, leaving Thomas and his mother alone at Beech Fork. The next year, together with his sister Nancy Brumfield and his mother, Thomas journeyed back to Hardin County, where he remained until his departure to Indiana to 1816.

During the remaining years in Kentucky, he was occupied as a laborer, carpenter and farmer. He purchased the 238 acre farm for 118 pounds sterling. Within two years, he was able to sell to Bleakly and Montgomery, Elizabethtown merchants, "2400 pounds of pork 15 pence (per pound) and 494 pounds of beef at 15 pence."[13] County records attest that he was a taxpayer, petitioner, juryman and patroller.

Perhaps his greatest adventure came in the spring of 1806 when he was hired to construct a flatboat and, with Isaac Bush, transport merchandise

to New Orleans. After the successful completion of the trip, Bleakley and Montgomery credited his account with seventeen pounds.[14] His economic solvency placed him in a position to contemplate marriage.

The circumstances of the meeting and courtship of Thomas and Nancy Hanks are shrouded in vagueness. Certainly the background and reputation of the Hanks family has run the historical gamut from William Herndon's contemptuous account to deification by Mrs. Caroline Hitchcock.

Nancy Hanks was born to Lucy Hanks, father unknown, on February 5, 1784, in Mineral County, West Virginia.[15] Her family was of English origin. The records indicate that Nancy Hanks' ancestors came from London in October, 1699, and landed in Plymouth, Massachusetts. The Hanks family was known as "a remarkably inventive family and a family of founders. Some of the examples of their contributions to early American society were erecting the first silk mills in America run by water power, making Sunday school publications, and innumerable inventions."[16]

The Hanks family then moved to Nelson County, Kentucky, on the opposite side of the Salt River where, in after years, Nancy would live with Thomas Lincoln. Nancy first lived with her mother, Lucy, who had married Henry Sparrow, and then went to a more ideal arrangement with Thomas and Elizabeth Hanks Sparrow.[17]

Louis Warren describes Nancy Hanks at the time of her marriage to Thomas Lincoln as "above the ordinary height in stature, weighed about one hundred thirty pounds, and was slenderly built. Her skin was dark, her hair was brown, her eyes were grey and small, forehead prominent, face sharp and angular, with a marked expression for melancholy which fixed itself in the memory of all who ever saw or knew her."[18]

According to the Hardin County commissioners' returns, Thomas Lincoln was a resident of that county at the time of his marriage to Nancy Hanks. On June 10, 1806, Thomas Lincoln, with Richard Berry as bondsman, filed his declaration of intent to marry Nancy. Reverend Jesse Head recorded that Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks were married two days later on June 12, 1806.[19]

Shortly after their marriage, the newlyweds settled in Elizabethtown. The tax list for 1807 reveals that Thomas Lincoln owned a cabin and two town lots.[20] On February 10, 1807, Sarah was born to Thomas and Nancy Lincoln.

While living in Hardin County, Thomas' trade was carpentry. Hired by Denton Geoheagan to hew logs for the construction of a sawmill, Lincoln encountered contractual problems. Geoheagan refused to pay him, claiming the work was not done according to specifications. Lincoln brought suit and in March, 1807, won. Geoheagan appealed but the case was dismissed and Lincoln was paid his money.[21]

Although carpentry was his principal occupation, his service to the public was considerable. In 1803 he was a county criminal guardsman; served on juries on several occasions; was a road surveyor; and, in 1805, was appointed a patroller in the northwest district of Hardin County.[22]

But the President's father would encounter many legal battles, particularly over land titles. When he tried to sell his 238-acre Mill Creek farm, a faulty survey cost him thirty-eight acres.[23]

On December 12, 1808, Thomas Lincoln purchased a 300-acre tract known as the Sinking Spring farm for $200 from Isaac Bush. This was the same Isaac Bush who had accompanied Lincoln to New Orleans two years earlier. He had a sister named Sally (Sarah) who later would play a major role in Thomas Lincoln's life. Here the Lincolns lived in a one-room log cabin near a limestone spring; it was in this log cabin that Abraham Lincoln was born on February 12, 1809. This land was less fertile than the Mill Creek acreage; however, Thomas Lincoln remained here for two years tilling a few acres, hunting and doing some carpentry.

As with the Mill Creek farm, so, too, the Sinking Spring property: another legal problem. In 1813 Thomas Lincoln, along with the two former owners of the Sinking Spring farm (David Vance and Isaac Bush), were defendants in a suit brought against them by the original owner, Richard Mather. The suit dealt with recovering a payment on a note of sixty-one dollars due to Mather from Vance. The property fell into litigation and Lincoln lost the farm. Without waiting for a trial Lincoln took his family and left. In January 1816, the court handed down the decision. Vance was to pay Mather the sixty-one dollars and Isaac Bush was ordered to return the $200 to Lincoln.[24]

In 1811 Thomas Lincoln acquired another piece of property, about ten miles north of the Sinking Spring farm. The new farm, purchased from George Lindsey, was 228-acres on Knob Creek. It was in this area where Abraham Lincoln spent most of his childhood days and received some of his formal education. Both Sarah and Abraham were sent to nearby "ABC" or "blab" schools. In these schools the students were required to study aloud because textbooks were few. Lessons consisted of spelling, reading and writing. The Lincoln children's first teachers were Jachariah Riney and Caleb Hazel.[25] Albert J. Beveridge estimated that at best, Abraham and Sarah received only three months of formal education while in Kentucky.[26]

Sometime during 1811, a third child was born to Thomas and Nancy Lincoln. Named Thomas, after his father, he died in infancy.[27] At this time the Lincolns became members of the Baptist congregation known as the Little Mount Church. Here, Thomas Lincoln was baptized by Reverend William Downs.[28]

The Knob Creek Valley was well-settled and neighbors were within walking distance. What might have been the most prosperous time of Thomas Lincoln's life was cut short by litigation over the title of his farm. He and nine of his neighbors were called on to defend their titles. Although the Federal government's surveying methods were uniform, the older state's were antiquated. As Warren observed, "During a period of eight years Thomas had held 816 1/2 acres of land but all he salvaged from these holdings was two hundred acres. He sold these in 1814 and took a loss of eighteen pounds under this original purchase price because of a faulty survey."[29] Not surprisingly, Thomas Lincoln started contemplating a move away from the land of spurious land titles and the peculiar institution of slavery.

Footnotes

[1]Warren, Louis A., *Lincoln's Youth — Indiana Years*, (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1959). p. 4.

[2]Coleman, Charles H., "Lincoln's Lincoln Ancestors," *Charleston Daily News*, February 12, 1958.

[3]Warren, Louis A., "Earliest Home of Lincolns in England," *Lincoln Lore*, #851 (July, 1945). p. 1.

[4]Wayland, John W., *The Lincolns in Virginia*, (Staunton, Virginia: The McClure Printing Co., 1946). p. 52.

[5]Coleman, Charles H., "Lincoln's Lincoln Grandmother," *Journal of Illinois State Historical Society*, (Spring, 1959). p. 70.

[6]*Ibid.*, p. 72.

[7]Warren, Louis A., *Lincoln's Parentage and Childhood*, (New York: The Century Co., 1926). p. 8.

[8]Peterson, James A., *Thomas Lincoln . . . A Gentleman*, (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Historical Library, Old State Capitol, 1978), p. 11.

[9]Coleman, "Lincoln's Lincoln Grandmother." p. 87.

[10]Warren, *Lincoln's Parentage*, p. 40.

[11]McMurtry, Gerald, *The Lincolns in Elizabethtown, Kentucky*, (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Lincolniana Publishers, 1932). p. 2.

[12]Williams, Samuel C., *The Lincolns and Tennessee*, (Harrogate, Tennessee: Lincoln Memorial University Press, 1942). p. 14.

[13]Warren, *Lincoln's Youth-Indiana Years*, p. 5.

[14]McMurtry, Gerald, "The Bleakley and Montgomery Ledger," *Lincoln Lore*, #1479, (May, 1961).

[15]Baber, Adin., Nancy Hanks: *The Destined Mother of a President*, (Kansas, Illinois: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1963, p. 55. See also: Barton, William E., *The Life of Abraham Lincoln.*, (Indianapolis, Indiana: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1925), p. 64.

[16]*Ibid.*, p. 11.

[17]Barton, *Life of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 64.

[18]Warren, *Parentage and Childhood*, p. 73.

[19]*Ibid.*, p. 50.

[20]*Ibid.*, p. 51.

[21]*Ibid.*, p. 308-9.

[22]*Ibid.*, p. 182-7.

[23]*Ibid.*, p. 190.

[24]Warren, *Parentage and Childhood*, p. 117.

[25]Warren, "Lincoln's Primary Education," *Lincoln Lore*, #116, August 28, 1950.

[26]Beveridge, Albert J., *Abraham Lincoln*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1928), p. 29.

[27]Coleman, Charles H., *Notes* (Charleston, Illinois: History Department, Eastern Illinois University), *Lincoln's Kinsmen* #9.
[28]Beveridge, *Abraham Lincoln*, p. 36.
[29]Warren, *Lincoln's Youth — Indiana Years*, p. 13.

II. The Indiana Years, 1816-1830

Thomas Lincoln moved frequently during his seventy years: he resided in fourteen homes in four states. Relocation was not an infrequent occurrence for western families in the nineteenth century. Not alone did the loathsome specter of uncertain land titles nag at Thomas Lincoln, but the magnetism of virgin Indiana land glowingly described by friends north of the Ohio River. Dennis Hanks observed that the social climate of Kentucky "... was getting stuck up with some folks rich enough to own niggers, so it didn't seem no place for poor folks no more."[30] Abraham Lincoln, in a presidential campaign autobiographical sketch of his life, written in 1860, stated that his father moved from Kentucky "partly on account of slavery, but chiefly on account of the difficulty in land titles."[31]

A previous trip by Thomas Lincoln to select a suitable homesite was probably made in November, 1816. He rafted across the Ohio River and left his belongings with Francis Posey and, according to Nicolay and Hay, after a one-day journey he selected a place for his future homesite.[32] He quickly marked off the land, erected a temporary shelter (half-faced camp) and returned to Kentucky for his family.

The emigrating family left Knob Creek and moved to what is now Spencer County, probably no later than mid-December, 1816, about the time Indiana became a state. The family traveled slowly with two pack horses, a cow, and an oxen-drawn wagon which carried all their possessions. They determined not to encumber themselves with tables, chairs and cupboards—Thomas could build these things after their arrival. They did, however, take their feather bed and coverings, spinning wheel and cooking utensils.[33] The distance from Knob Creek to Pigeon Creek was about 100 miles. The trip took about two weeks.[34] Although winter was approaching, there is no indication that they planned to reach the new Indiana home within a specified time; the family proceeded leisurely at a moderate rate of travel.[35] Once across the Ohio River, it took two days to complete the most difficult part of the journey–the sixteen miles from the river through the heavily wooded area to the new homestead near the banks of Pigeon Creek.

Upon arrival, the family used the "half-faced camp" shelter until a cabin was built. With help from the neighbors, Thomas would have the cabin ready for occupancy in four or five days.[36] The four Lincolns moved into the rough cabin probably no later than Christmas Day, 1816. The "half-faced camp" was then converted into a stable until Thomas and Betsy Sparrow arrived in the fall of 1817 and used it temporarily until a cabin could be constructed for them.

Although the Lincolns arrived in Indiana in December, 1816, "it was more than a year since he squatted on the land that Thomas Lincoln thought to enter it legally."[37] On October 15, 1817, he and two of his neighbors made the 120-mile round-trip to the government land office at Vincennes and made the initial sixteen dollar payment on 160 acres. In December he paid an additional sixty-four dollars. This eighty dollar amount represented the first of four installments to be paid on the $320 owed.[38] He and his family would live on this land until 1830.

Education on the frontier was as crude as the cabin nine-year-old Sarah and seven-year-old Abraham inhabited. In such a sparsely settled area, school attendance was sporadic and the home not only initiated but provided the youngsters' intellectual training. Abraham could both read and write. One author asserted:

> For this acquirement he manifested a great fondness. It was his custom to form letters, to write words and sentences wherever he found suitable material. He scrawled them with charcoal, he scored them in the dust, in the sand, in the snow–anywhere and everywhere that lines could be drawn, there he improved his capacity for writing.[39]

The Lincoln children apparently became familiar with Dilworth's Speller. The publication, popular in early America, contained parts dealing with history, geography, grammar, prose, and a dozen "Select Fables." But as a book, it may have been second in importance to the Bible. Nancy Hanks Lincoln would customarily read their "First Book" on the Sabbath. As Abraham and Sarah learned to read, they, too, helped share the duty of Scripture reading on Sundays.[40]

The cultivation of pioneer children's intellectualism also could be accomplished by storytelling. It was always a big event, especially when so few books were available. Both parents had first-hand experiences to relate about a subject that must have stimulated frontier kids–Indians. Thomas probably repeated the death of grandfather Abraham innumerable times.

But the serenity of frontier life would suddenly become brutal. In the autumn of 1818 the Pigeon Creek community was hit by an epidemic called "milk-sick." This was a frequently fatal illness caused by poisonous herbs eaten by cattle and transferred to humans.[41] The settlers realized that their cattle were in some way responsible for the sickness. They were alerted when a cow came down with the "trembles" and died, but they did not know what caused the cow's death. They suspected the water source and vegetation may have been contaminated by minerals from the morning dew. The blooming snakeroot produced a poison that was quickly absorbed into the cow's system and passed on to humans through the milk.[42]

One of Thomas Lincoln's cows had the trembles and shortly after Thomas Sparrow was stricken. He died a few days later. Abruptly, his wife became a victim, and then a neighbor, Mrs. Peter Brooner. Nancy

Lincoln nursed both, then she became afflicted. Within a week all were dead. Nancy died on October 5, 1818. The body was prepared for burial in the one-room cabin in which the family lived. Thomas had to make the coffin that Nancy was buried in, and Abraham whittled the wooden pegs that secured the lid.[43] Burial was on a hill about 1500 feet south of the cabin. The Reverend David Elkin delivered the sermon. The Baptist minister had been invited by young Abraham, according to local tradition.[44]

Years later people reminiscing in southern Indiana would remember Nancy Hanks Lincoln and "the gentleness and brightness she left everywhere she went, like a ray of sunshine."[45] For the Lincolns, it was a time of sadness. although both children missed their mother, it was Sarah who suffered the most. Sarah had no female friends and relatives nearby and, at the age of eleven, had to take over the domestic chores.

Dennis Hanks, who lived with the Lincolns after the deaths of the Sparrows, recalled that Nancy "was one of the very best women in the whole race known for kindness, tenderness, charity, and love to the world. Mrs. Lincoln always taught Abe goodness, kindness, read the good Bible to him, taught him to read and to spell, taught him sweetness and benevolence as well."[46]

Fourteen months after Nancy died, Thomas went back to Kentucky to find a wife and mother for his children. In Elizabethtown, he courted and won the hand of widow Sarah Bush Johnston. Thomas, ten years Sarah's senior, had first met Sally some twenty years earlier. He had worked with Sally's father, made the long trip to New Orleans with her brother, and, in short, had know the family for years. Sally's first husband had had serious financial problems all of his life. When he died in April, 1814, he left her with three children: Sarah Elizabeth, Matilda, John, and many debts.[47]

Thomas proposed to Sarah shortly after his arrival in Elizabethtown. She consulted with her brothers, all of whom urged her to accept for they knew and liked Thomas.[48] However, she was hesitant because of her indebtedness. Thomas readily agreed to pay the obligations and, on December 2, 1819, the Reverend George L. Rogers married Sarah Bush Johnston and Thomas Lincoln.[49]

A second Lincoln caravan set out from Kentucky bound for Indiana. Thomas rode horseback while Sarah and her children crowded into a wagon with their belongings. Her possessions consisted of a bureau, table, set of chairs, clothespress, bedclothes, and kitchenware. There was also clothing for her and the children.[50]

The union of the two families: Sally and her three children, ages 12, 10 and 8 and Thomas with two, ages 12 and 10, must have presented a challenge to Sarah. But she set up her household and gradually changed the physical and emotional atmosphere of the Lincoln home. She indicated to Thomas what repairs were needed about the cabin, and he made the necessary improvements.[51] Thomas also had to clear additional land in order to feed the eight living in the small cabin (Dennis Hanks was to remain until his marriage).[52]

Sarah was a special woman with hidden talents. Not only was she a good homemaker, but she had the ability to blend together children from three different backgrounds–Dennis Hanks, the Johnstons and the Lincoln children–into one close-knit harmonious group. One of her children later stated: "When father and mother married he had children and we went there to live with her, and she took the children and mixed us all up together like hasty pudding, and has not know us apart since."[53]

It had been four years since Sarah and Abraham had attended school. With the addition of three school-age children, the Lincolns were enrolled in Andrew Crawford's Little Pigeon Creek school. The short term, usually two or three months, subscription schools were open during non-farming seasons. Although reading aloud from the Bible was routine, Crawford stressed proper etiquette far more than the "readin', writin', and cipherin'. The children later attended schools taught by Azel W. Dorsey and William Sweeney.

On June 14, 1821, Abraham lost his companion, Dennis Hanks, nine years his senior, to marriage. Dennis and Elizabeth Johnston, Sarah's oldest daughter, moved into their own cabin nearby. Dennis was soon replaced by his cousin John Hanks, who was to stay with the Lincolns for four years.[54] That same year, four members of the Lincoln household became members of the Little Pigeon Creek Baptist Church. On June 7, 1823, Thomas Lincoln and his wife joined the church; he by "letter" and she by "experience of grace."[55] His daughter Sarah and his stepdaughter Elizabeth Johnston Hanks also became members. For Thomas Lincoln it was a strong commitment; he became a very prominent member. As one of its trustees, Thomas served as a moderator for the church at some of its meetings and made repairs and improvements to the meeting house.[56] On April 10, 1824, he was appointed by the church board to attend a conference. Later, as a member of the discipline committee, he visited a man and wife who had separated and interviewed members who had not been observing proper discipline.[57] In addition, he donated material goods as well as his carpentry skills. In March, 1827, he gave twenty-four pounds of "manufactured corn".[58] Although the Lincolns remained members of the Little Pigeon Creek Baptist Church until their move to Coles County, Illinois in 1830, Thomas Lincoln resigned as trustee in 1828. However, on January 10, 1830, he was again appointed to the discipline committee to settle a quarrel between two sisters of the congregation.[59]

Abraham's younger sister, Sarah, nineteen-years-old, married twenty-five-year-old Aaron Grigsby on August 2, 1826. The Reverend Charles Harper, minister of Little Pigeon Church, performed the marriage service.[60] The Grigsby family had lived in the community for years and bride and groom had attended the same church. Thomas Lincoln presented Sarah with a dowry that included "a new feather bed, with all necessary clothing, with pillow and bolster, all of decent home manufacture."[61] She received a cow, calf, and horses, as was the custom of the

time. The young couple moved to a tract of land some two miles south of the Lincolns.

The marriage ceremony was scarcely over before Matilda Johnston married Squire Hall. The youngest daughter of Sarah and Daniel Johnston was barely 15, but at least a year older than sister Elizabeth when she married Dennis Hanks, Squire's half-brother. The Reverend Young Lamar, who had performed the funeral rites for Nancy Lincoln, officiated. Temporarily, the couple would live with Dennis and Elizabeth Hanks.[62]

The bliss of these marriages was short-lived. On January 29, 1828, Sarah Lincoln Grigsby died in childbirth. "I remember the night she died," a neighbor recalled years later. "My mother was there at the time. She had a strong voice, and I heard her calling father . . . He went after a doctor, but it was too late. They let her lay too long."[63]

Sarah, with her stillborn baby in her arms, was buried in the new cemetery, next to the Little Pigeon church.[64] The two tragedies–the death of his mother when he was seven, and his beloved sister near his nineteenth birthday–left a scar on Abraham. He became "witty and sad and thoughtful by turns."[65] The periods of depression and joviality may have been pronounced after these calamities, but remained a part of his personality the rest of his life. But his melancholy may have been tempered by a unique opportunity that would be indelibly stamped in his mind: he was going to New Orleans.

James Gentry, a local merchant, had surplus goods sufficient to fill a sixty-five foot-long flatboat. Abraham was contracted–eight dollars a month–to assist in the construction and with Allen Gentry, the merchant's son, to make the 1,200-mile trip from Rockport, Indiana to New Orleans.[66] Although neither kept a diary, Abraham, from time to time, recalled every incident of the experience. They traded their cargo for cotton, tobacco and sugar; they were assaulted below Baton Rouge by some thugs attempting to steal the cargo; and they walked the streets of the largest port in the west and "stood and watched the slaves sold in New Orleans and Abraham was very angry . . . "[67]

Although Thomas Lincoln relied on his carpentry for a living, he maintained several acres of land for farming and throughout his years in Indiana and made several land deals. He took advantage of a new federal land law and relinquished a tract to the government in order to complete the payment on his eighty acre farm at Pigeon Creek.[68] With the acquisition of twenty acres of land from David Casebier, he could boast that he held one hundred acres free of debt. His Indiana land transactions had been businesslike and produced economic security.

In the fall of 1829, a neighbor observed Abraham cutting down a large tree and "I asked him what he was going to do with it; he said he was going to saw it into planks for his father's new house.[69] Thomas Lincoln had decided to build a new house–the third–on the knoll near Pigeon Creek. The family would never live in it, although in later years the structure would be identified as the Lincoln family home.

Apparently, Sarah grew apprehensive about the lingering "milk-sickness" in the area and convinced him to stop the construction work and prepare for a move to Illinois.[70]

John Hanks, who had lived with the Lincolns for four years, had moved to Macon County, Illinois, and through his letters, encouraged the family to relocate in the fertile prairies. Dennis and Squire Hall became proponents of the idea and soon convinced Sarah who, in turn, solicited the reluctant Thomas. Abraham was put to work cutting trees large enough to make wagon wheels. The lumber that was to have been used for the house and eighty (of 100) acres were sold for $125.[71]

On September 8, 1829, Thomas and Sarah Bush Lincoln made a trip to her previous home in Elizabethtown, Kentucky, where they sold her property that had once belonged to her first husband. For this they received $123.00.[72] With this cash, they proceeded to make preparations for the trip, which included the purchase of oxen and household goods.

It may have been the determination of Dennis Hanks and Squire Hall to move and the consternation of Sarah over the loss of her daughter that caused the pressure to be exerted over Thomas. He was fifty-two years old, reasonably secure as a land owner who had a hundred hogs and over five hundred bushels of corn, and not overly enthusiastic about the move. "Considering all this, it seems that some pressure must have been brought to bear on him to win his consent to start life over again on a new frontier," said Warren.[73] Abraham's aim to secure work on the Ohio River was terminated, although he was of age–twenty-one—and enjoyed freedom of choice.

Regardless of how Thomas Lincoln may have felt about the move, preparations were begun for the trek in late January or early February, 1830. It took the Lincoln, Hanks and Hall clans four to six weeks to ready themselves for the endeavor. They sold their land, grain and stock. Three wagons were built, one for each family, and they were loaded with household goods, women and children. On March 1, 1830, they set out on the first leg–fifty miles–of the trip to Vincennes, the largest city in Indiana at that time.

Of the Lincoln family that had come to Indiana from Kentucky, only Thomas and Abraham survived to make the move to Illinois. The migrating party consisted of thirteen persons in three units: Thomas (52), Sarah Bush Lincoln (41), Abraham (21) and John D. Johnston (19); Dennis (31) and Elizabeth Johnston Hanks (22) with their four children, Sarah (8), John (7), Nancy (6), and Harriet (4); Squire (25) and Matilda Johnston Hall (20) and their eleven-month-old son, John. Dennis Hanks remembered that "We all went–Lincolns, Hankses, and Johnstons all hanging together. Kinda like the tribes of Israel that you can't break up."[74]

After arriving in Vincennes and staying a day or two, they rafted across the Wabash river north of the city and entered Illinois at a place called Westport. From there, they headed northwest for the black loam of Macon County.

Said Dr. Coleman: "They passed through Lawrenceville, Palestone, and Darwin. Here they struck out in a northwesterly direction, passing through Richwoods (about three miles east of the present village of Westfield) and continuing to a point about six miles west of Charleston, called Dead Man's Grove; thence north through Nelsonville (or Nelson, no longer in existence. It was about three miles southeast of Sullivan) and on to Decatur."[75]

The trip took two weeks. It involved crossing eastern Illinois over alternately freezing and thawing roads and dangerous rivers. Due to these conditions, "it was a long and tedious journey with many delays."[76] Abraham recalled that the journey was "painfully slow and tiresome."[77]

On about March 15, 1830, the migrants arrived at John Hanks's home about six miles west of Decatur. He showed the newcomers the country and the river that the Indians had named the Sangamon (Land of Plenty to Eat), and took them to the place he had selected for them as a homesite. On a bluff overlooking the north fork of the Sangamon river, the site was well-wooded, providing the material needed to build a cabin. The joint effort of Thomas and Abraham Lincoln, John and Dennis Hanks, and Squire Hall constructed the cabin. Abraham and John then took the oxen, "broke-up" fifteen acres of land and split enough rails to fence it in.[78]

The Lincoln, Hanks, and Hall families remained, as a group, for only a short time. In their midst was a "recently full-grown man who could vote and who was legally free from his father's commands. He could come and go; he was footloose."[79] From this place in Illinois, Abraham Lincoln would leave his family and journey westward to seek his own destiny.

Footnotes

[30]Atkinson, Eleanor, *The Beyond of Lincoln*, (New York: The McClure Co., 1908), p. 14.

[31]Bartlett, D.W., *The Life and Public Services of Hon. Abraham Lincoln*, (New York: H. Dayton, 1860), p. 17.

[32]Angle, Paul M., *The Lincoln Reader*, (New Brunswick, N.J.; Rutgers University Press, 1947), p. 17.

[33]Warren, *Lincoln's Youth — Indiana Years*, p. 18.

[34]*Ibid.*, p. 16.

[35]McMurtry, Gerald R., "The Lincoln Migration from Kentucky to Indiana, 1816," *Indiana Magazine of History*, Vol. 33, #4, December, 1937, p. 22.

[36]Warren, *Lincoln's Youth — Indiana Years*, p. 22.

[37]Beveridge, *Abraham Lincoln*, p. 47.

[38]Warren, *Lincoln's Youth — Indiana Years*, p. 42.

[39]*Ibid.*, p. 25.

[40]*Ibid.*, p. 30.

[41]Lee, J. Henry and Hutchinson, J.R., *The Ancestry of Abraham Lincoln*, (Boston: The Century Company, 1890), p. 30.

[42]Warren, *Lincoln's Youth — Indiana Years*, p. 52.

[43]*Ibid.*, p. 55.

[44]Warren, *Lincoln's Youth — Indiana Years*, p. 55.

[45]Hitchcock, Caroline Hanks, *Nancy Hanks: The Story of Abraham Lincoln's Mother*, (New York: Doubleday & McClure Co., 1900), p. 103.

[46]Warren, *Lincoln's Youth — Indiana Years*, p. 57.

[47]*Ibid.*, p. 62.

[48]Malone, Thomas J., "Stepmothered To Greatness, *American Legion Magazine*, February 1939, p. 4.

[49]Warren, Louis A., "Widower Lincoln Marries Widow Johnston," *Lincoln Lore*, #765, December 6, 1943.

[50]Warren, *Lincoln's Youth — Indiana Years*, p. 65.

[51]Coleman, *Notes*, "Grave of Sarah Bush Lincoln, Who Reared 'Uncle Abe', Unmarked and Unforgotten," by George E. Mason in paper of unknown origin, (1906?) Scrapbook of Mrs. Walton Alexander.

[52]Warren, *Lincoln's Youth — Indiana Years*, p. 66.

[53]*Ibid.*, p. 66.

[54]Malone, "Stepmothered . . . "., p. 8.

[55]Coleman, *Notes*, Undated newspaper article from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

[56]Coleman, *Notes*, *Lincoln Lore*.

[57]Coleman, *Notes*, *Lincoln Day by Day, 1809-1939*, by Harry E. Pratt, p. 6.

[58]*Ibid.*, p. 6.

[59]*Ibid.*, p. 7.

[60]Warren, *Lincoln's Youth — Indiana Years*, p. 152.

[61]*Ibid.*, p. 154.

[62]*Ibid.*, p. 154.

[63]*Ibid.*, p. 173.

[64]Warren, *Lincoln's Youth — Indiana Years*, p. 174. Two years later, Aaron remarried, but died the following year. He as buried next to Sarah.

[65]*Ibid.*, p. 174.

[66]*Ibid.*, p. 175.

[67]*Ibid.*, p. 185.

[68]Warren, *Lincoln's Youth — Indiana Years*, p. 159.

[69]*Ibid.*, p. 203.

[70]Lamon, Ward H., *The Life of Abraham Lincoln*, (Boston: James R. Osgood & Co., 1872), p. 26.

[71]Angle, *Lincoln Reader*, p. 33.

[72]*Ibid.*, p. 33.

[73]Warren, *Lincoln's Youth — Indiana Years*, p. 206.

[74]Atkinson, *Boyhood*, p. 41.

[75]Coleman, Charles H., *Abraham Lincoln and Coles County, Illinois*. (New Brunswick, N.J., Scarecrow Press, 1955). p. 9.

[76]Indiana Lincoln Highway Commission, *Report*, p. 7.

[77]Angle, *Lincoln Reader*, p. 34.

[78]Beveridge, *Abraham Lincoln*, p. 104.

[79]Angle, *Lincoln Reader*, p. 34.

III. The Illinois Years, 1830-1851

By March, 1831, the Lincoln-Hanks-Hall families were as eager to return to Indiana as they had been to leave there only a year earlier. During the short stay in Macon County, they experienced one of the harshest winters in Illinois history. It was brutal. For days the temperature remained below zero and the snow drifts reached a depth of four feet or more.[80] The families agreed, after that "winter of the deep snow," to return to Indiana in May.

As the party passed through western Coles County, they stopped at the home of John Sawyer, another former Kentuckian, who had lived in the area for three years. It is believed that Sawyer was able to persuade Thomas to settle in a neighboring area known as "Buck Grove."[81] The Buck Grove farm was public land and never during the years that Thomas lived on it did he obtain a proper title. This was the only place in Illinois where he could be considered as a squatter. The four other properties he occupied were either his own or his stepson's.[82] The inhabitants of the Buck Grove farm were Thomas and Sarah Lincoln and, later, John D. Johnston. Abraham may have stayed with them for about a month in July, 1831, before leaving for New Salem. Earlier, Denton Offut had offered Abraham a job, not unlike what had happened to his father twenty-five years ago: construct a flatboat and take goods to New Orleans. On May 1, about the time his family and relatives left Macon County, Abraham, John D. Johnston and John Hanks embarked for New Orleans. After the delivery of the produce they returned, in June, 1831, by riverboat.[83]

Following this trip, Abraham stayed in Coles County for a few weeks. It was during this visit that the legendary wrestling match with Daniel P. Needham occurred. Both six feet four inches, the match was brief, and Lincoln threw Needham with ease.[84] A few months later, at New Salem, the feat would be repeated with Jack Armstrong.

During the next few years Thomas Lincoln would be an aggressive land purchaser. From his stepson, John D. Johnston, he acquired forty acres for seventy-five dollars. The farm, called Muddy Point, was located about a mile southwest of Lerna, and, it is believed, Johnston assisted in constructing a cabin.[85] Thomas and Sarah lived there until May, 1837. Earlier, he had secured, for $102, eighty acres of public land known as the "Plummer Place." He and his wife were to live there for only a few months. On May 3, 1837, he sold Muddy Point to Alexander Montgomery for $140 and moved to the Plummer Place.[86] The new homestead was a half mile south of the Muddy Point farm. There is no record of Abraham Lincoln visiting his family during this period: he was too busy moving to Springfield and attending the legislature in Vandalia.[87]

Both Thomas and John D. Johnston secured land in the so-called "Goosenest Prairie" area and combined an existing empty cabin with another they constructed to accommodate the two families. On December 31, 1840, Thomas gave Johnston fifty dollars for his forty acres, and he now owned 120 acres. So, in August, 1837, Thomas and Sarah Lincoln, John D. Johnston and his wife, Mary, and their son, Thomas Lincoln Davis, moved into The Goosenest Prairie Cabin. It was here that Thomas Lincoln lived from 1837-1851.

In late December, a few months after they moved, Thomas decided to sell the Plummer Place. The $222.50 sale–a remarkable profit on his four year $102 investment–left him with only the 120-acre Goosenest Prairie farm.

Following the 1837 move to Goosenest Prairie, Thomas Lincoln turned his attention to establishing a new life in Coles County. Although his main occupation was that of a farmer, he continued to do carpentry and cabinet work. David Dryden, a neighbor of the Lincolns, related how Thomas helped in his blacksmith shop during the slow winter months.[88]

In 1841, Thomas began to have a recurrence of the financial difficulties of the past. In October, while visiting the family, Abraham learned of his father's plight and offered to purchase the "east forty" of the 120-acre farm. As Coleman concluded, it was really a gift because "the agreement allowed Thomas and Sarah Lincoln to retain 'use and entire control' of the property 'during both and each of their natural lives.'"[89]

This represented the eighth real estate transaction made by Thomas Lincoln after this initial purchase in 1834. Although he had succeeded in acquiring land for security in his old age, economic independence would always be wanting. The burden he would carry was placed there by his stepson, John D. Johnston.

The severity of the financial crisis that Thomas Lincoln and John D. Johnston had reached could be corroborated by a letter of desperation received by Abraham in December, 1848. Written by Johnston–Thomas could not write except for his name–it was of two parts. In the first part, Thomas acknowledged the failure to retain a receipt for payment of a note eight years earlier and the possibility of a farm foreclosure being very real. He asked Lincoln for twenty dollars to prevent the legal action. The second part–on the same sheet of paper–consisted of a request, from Johnston, for "70 or 80" dollars to clear up his indebtedness.[90]

Abraham "cheerfully" sent his father the twenty dollars with a soft admonition to be more careful about such matters. Instead of the "70 or 80" dollars, Johnston got a proposition that he never adopted. Directly to the point, Lincoln said:

> Your request for eighty dollars, I do not think it best, to comply with now . . . I doubt whether since I saw you, you have done a good whole day's work in any one day . . . You are now in need of some money: and what I propose is, that you should go to work, "tooth and nails," for somebody who will give you money [for] it . . . And to secure you a fair reward for your labor, I now promise you, that for every dollar you will, between this and the first of next May, get for your own labor, either in money, or as your own indebtedness, I will then give you one other dollar . . ."[91]

There is no evidence that Abraham was called upon to match Johnston's earnings. Indeed, Johnston's financial difficulties continued. His excuses multiplied and Abraham concluded one letter with: "Your thousand pretenses for not getting along better are all nonsense–they deceive nobody but yourself. *Go to work* is the only cure for your case."[92]

Abraham was an often visitor to Charleston and his parent's Goosenest Prairie home during the 1840-50 decade. Assistance to his financially-plagued father were numerous—at least five times—but never an expression of disapprobation or admonishment.

On May 25, 1849, Abraham received a letter from Johnston exhorting him to hurry home that Thomas was "yet alive and that is all."[93] It had an ominous ring that Abraham could not ignore. Then two letters from Augustus Chapman—the first affirming the anxiety of Johnston, the second questioning the seriousness of Thomas' condition–caused Abraham to drop plans to go to Washington, D.C. and proceed to Coles County. Chapman's second letter was correct; it was not serious. Abraham returned to Springfield and then went to the Capitol in an attempt to get the appointment as Commissioner of the General Land Office. He failed.[94]

Thomas Lincoln's condition did worsen during the winter of 1850-51. Letters from Johnston and Harriet Hanks Chapman elicited a letter from Abraham, but not a personal visitation. Dr. Coleman believes that Lincoln underestimated the seriousness of Thomas' illness.[95] He would later often visit the Shiloh cemetery after his father's death. His last graveyard call was as President-elect on January 31, 1861.

Footnotes

[80]Mattoon *Journal Gazette*, July 2, 1976.
[81]Coleman, *Coles County*, p. 19.
[82]*Ibid.*, p. 20.
[83]Coleman, *Coles County*, p. 19.
[84]*Ibid.*, p. 20.
[85]*Ibid.*, p. 32.
[86]*Ibid.*, p. 31.
[87]*Ibid.*, p. 32.
[88]Coleman, *Coles County*, p. 53.
[89]*Ibid.*, p. 61.
[90]Coleman, *Coles County* p. 75.
[91]Basler, Roy P. (editor), *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, (New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers Uni. Press, 1935), Vol. II, p. 15-16.
[92]*Ibid.*, p. 112.
[93]Coleman, *Coles County*, p. 128.
[94]Thomas, *Abraham Lincoln*, p. 129.
[95]Coleman, *Coles County*, p. 131.

IV. Thomas Lincoln and His Relationship with Abraham

Descriptions of the appearance of Thomas Lincoln at maturity are a matter of conjecture and dispute. This is particularly true since there is no known photograph of him in existence.[96] John Hall, a neighbor and relative of Sarah Bush Lincoln, stated that both he and Sarah "insisted on his having a picture taken just a year or two before his death, but he neglected to have it done."[97]

Thomas Lincoln was variously described as 5'9", 5'11", or six-feet tall and as being somewhat round-shouldered and standing very erect. He weighed from 170 to 200 pounds, although it is believed that he was about 196 pounds in the prime of his life. He was stocky with large bones and strong, heavy muscles, but not fat. Compactly built, he was sinewy and had great strength.[98] According to Augustus Chapman, "he had the reputation of being one of the stoutest men in Kentucky."[99]

Descriptions of Thomas Lincoln's hair ranged from light and sandy to coarse and black. One narrative stated that "his hair was such a dark shade of brown that it looked black and he wore it cut straight around on a level with the bottom of his ears, not shingled up the back."[100] Another account reported his hair as being "combed straight down [and] cut off squares at the ends, and not combing his front locks behind his ears, it gave him something of a picturesque appearance."[101] He was pictured as having a well-rounded or rather broad face, with coarse features and a florid or leathery complexion. His nose was described either as large and blunt, or straight. His eye color was remembered as dark hazel, deep gray or light blue.[102]

The evaluations of Thomas Lincoln's character are as contradictory as those of his appearance. He was recalled as a hard-working man who made a good living and paid his own way. Others characterized the elder Lincoln as an easy-going, good-natured, but not overly ambitious person. Mrs. Augustus Chapman said that he "walked rather slow [and] never seemed to be in a hurry."[103]

There were negative sketches of him. William Barton described him as being slow, careless, inert and dull, but still a man of quiet manners.[104] Others called him a vagabond or a poverty-stricken man.[105] Barton stated that Thomas was naturally indolent, disinclined to constant hard labor, thriftless and improvident.[106]

Dr. Charles Coleman disagreed with these evaluations. He pointed out that while Thomas was primarily a farmer, he also worked as a blacksmith, and was a carpenter and did cabinet work in addition to being "a partner in the operations of a saw and grist mill."[107] Coleman also rejected the assertion made by Benjamin Thomas that there was a steady retrogression in Lincoln's later years. Biographer Thomas maintained that "whatever energy and ambition Thomas displayed in early manhood soon abated, and eventually he seems to have forgotten how to write his name."[108] Writing of the land transaction in Coles County between 1834-

1840, Coleman stated that "Thomas was fifty-six-years-old in 1834, well past 'early manhood.' A number of documents signed by Thomas Lincoln during this period have been preserved . . . "[109]

Thomas Lincoln was described as a friendly man with a good disposition. He was sociable, peaceful and humble; a man who loved everybody and everything. He was "popular with his neighbors [and it was his desire] to be on terms of amity and sociability with everyone."[110] Like his son, Abraham, he was "fond of jokes and stories . . . "[111] Mrs. Sarah Jane Dowlin, granddaughter of Sarah Bush Lincoln, recalled that Thomas Lincoln

> . . . made a good living, and I reckon he would have got something ahead if he hadn't been so generous. He had the old Virginia notion of hospitality–liked to see people sit up at the table and eat hearty, and there were always plenty of his relations and grandmothers willing to live on him. Uncle Abe got his honesty and clean notions of living and his kind heart from his father. Maybe the Hanks family was smarter, but some of them couldn't hold a candle to Grandfather Lincoln when it came to morals. I've heard Grandfather Lincoln say, many a time, that he was kind and loving, and always paid his way, and never turned a dog from his door.[112]

Some accounts ascribed to him good sense, sound judgment, but only moderate ability, and that he was sensible and high-minded. William Green described Thomas "as the 'cleverest homespun man I ever saw' and said 'he could tell more good anecdotes than his son . . . '"[113] Still, Thomas' education was meager. Abraham wrote that his father "grew up litterally (sic) without education. He never did more in the way of writing than to bunglingly sign his own name."[114] Sarah Bush Lincoln said that he "could read a little, and could scarcely write his name."[115] However, even this was "something of a distinction in a time when so many men . . . with like advantages signed their names with a cross."[116] The earliest known date for the signature of Thomas Lincoln was 1801. It appears that he was able to write before either of his marriages and was not taught to write by either of his wives, as has been alleged.[117]

Mrs. Jane Price Fury was a neighbor who frequently visited Thomas Lincoln during his last illness and read the Bible to him. As Mrs. Fury's daughter, Mrs. Joseph H. Bean, told William E. Barton in 1922, "he could read the Bible himself and liked to do it, but he was old and weak and his sight was bad and he liked to have mother read him the Bible."[118]

According to his friends and neighbors, Thomas Lincoln was a man of strong character. He was reliable, law-abiding, inoffensive and worthy of respect. He was a "good neighbor, a good father, and a good husband."[119] His truthfulness and honesty are often mentioned. He was not a gambler and although he did drink, "he was temperate in his use of liquor . . . and he was not know to have any vicious habit."[120] Thomas

was a religious man who was active in his church and regularly said grace at meals.[121] Warren felt, "There could not [have been] many outstanding faults" in a man who long remained in the Baptist Church, a church of very strict discipline.[122] Reverend Thomas Goodwin of Charleston, Illinois, said of Thomas: "In his case I could not say aught but good . . . He was a consistent member through life of the . . . Christian Church or the Church of Christ and he was always truthful, conscientious and religious."[123]

The traditional image of Thomas Lincoln as a shiftless father for whom his son felt little respect or love has no real basis in fact. This image was the creation of certain Lincoln biographers, especially Ben Thomas and William Herndon. One can only speculate as to the reasons behind the creation of this image of Thomas Lincoln, but it may be they thought Abraham's nobility would be greatly enhanced if he came from poor stock. Louis A. Warren asserted:

> . . . humility, sobriety, industry, and integrity are some of the traits that characterized Thomas Lincoln we know . . . Of this we are sure, that Thomas Lincoln did not handicap Abraham by passing on to him traits of character that would need to be corrected.[124]

Some Lincoln biographers have stressed that his mother and stepmother were the only sources of affection that Abraham knew. However, Barton notes that ". . . both she [Nancy] and Thomas wanted a son and their first child had been a girl . . . In due time Thomas Lincoln stood awkwardly beside the bed of Nancy and looked into the face of his son . . . Thomas and Nancy were both happy."[125] Ida Tarbell felt that "The Lincoln home was undoubtedly rude, and in many ways uncomfortable, but it sheltered a happy family, and its poverty affected the new child but little."[126]

It is an American tradition to tell children about Abraham Lincoln reading his tattered books by the light of the fire after the day's work and the family settled in for the night. Richard Current draws upon a quote from Sarah Bush Lincoln to illustrate the father's interest in his son's education: " . . . as a usual thing, Mr. Lincoln never made Abe quit reading to do anything if he could avoid it . . . Mr. Lincoln could read a little and write his name; hence he wanted his boy Abraham to learn, and he encouraged him to do it in all ways he could."[127] And in Abraham Lincoln's own words,

> My father suffered greatly from the want of an education and he determined at an early age that I should be well-educated. And what do you think his idea of a good education was? We had an old dogeared arithmetic in our house, and father determined that somehow, or somehow else, I should cipher clear through that book.[128]

From the time Abraham was old enough, he worked with his father on the farm. He and his father became "companions of necessity." The life of a pioneer family was not easy, and every able-bodied person was required to contribute all that they could. This close association with his father must have caused Abraham to subconsciously pick up his father's personality traits. Warren believed that ". . . Thomas Lincoln was the type of man to invite a boy's admiration. He was a man of good morals, good health, and exceedingly good humor."[129]

An important aspect of the influence that Thomas had on Abraham is reflected in the latter's attitude toward slavery. Abraham said that the family's move to Indiana from Kentucky was partly on account of slavery.[130] Charles G. Vannest states that:

> The little Mount Baptist Church in Kentucky of which both Thomas and Nancy Lincoln were members was strongly opposed to slavery . . . Thomas Lincoln was against slavery and we have Abraham Lincoln's own word for it . . . that his father had said that slavery stood opposed both to the Bible and the Declaration of Independence.[131]

Abraham's decision in 1831 not to follow his family to Coles County marked the beginning of his manhood and altered the filial ties to his father; it signalled the end of Thomas's responsibilities as a parent and the beginning of a new relationship. That relationship was largely confined to correspondence and occasional visits by Abraham to Coles County. Thomas never traveled to Springfield. Some authors, William Herndon in particular, have intimated that these stop-overs, during the Circuit Court days, were solely for the purpose of seeing his stepmother, Sarah Bush Lincoln.

Even though Abraham's career had taken him a hundred miles from his family, he still remained concerned with their welfare and willing to be of service whenever needed. Five times he used his legal expertise to assist his beleaguered father. He spent hundreds of dollars to guarantee his parents of lifetime homestead. There is no evidence to suggest that his assistance was anything but voluntary.

Lincoln's concern for his father's welfare during the latter's lifetime, his willingness to offer financial and legal assistance, his efforts to make visits to his parents and other gestures do not suggest a lack of affection for his father. As Thomas Lincoln's sole heir, Abraham inherited the Goosenest Prairie farm, which he sold to his stepbrother for one dollar on the condition that the actual ownership and profits from the land belonged to, and were to be used for, Sarah Bush Lincoln. Joshua F. Speed, Abraham's friend and confidant, noted that Lincoln's "fondness for his stepmother and his watchful care over her after the death of his father deserves notice."[132] Local tradition has it Lincoln sent money to his stepmother every month and kept in contact with relatives and friends about his stepmother's health and happiness.

An openly affectionate father/son relationship would have been somewhat unusual; the 1800's was not a period when fathers publicly displayed affection for their sons, or vice-versa. That mutual respect was there is obvious, and mutual benefits resulted. As Barton said, "Every man is what he is partly because of what his parents, his grandparents and his remote ancestors were."[133]

Footnotes

[96]Coleman, *Coles County*, p. 52.
[97]Coleman, *Notes*, Statement from John Hall.
[98]Coleman, *Coles County*, p. 50-52.
[99]Coleman, *Notes*, Statement by Chapman to William Herndon, Sept. 18, 1865.
[100]Coleman, Dorothee, *Thomas Lincoln, Father of Abraham Lincoln*, (Manuscript, 1956), p. 11.
[101]Coleman, *Notes*, Lerna *Weekly Eagle*, April 25, 1930, p. 17.
[102]Coleman, *Coles County*, p. 50-52.
[103]Coleman, *Notes*, Statement of Mrs. A.H. Chapman.
[104]Barton, William E., *The Paternity of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 265.
[105]Warren, Louis A., "The Shiftless Father Myth," *The Lincoln Kinsman*, (Fort Wayne, Indiana; The Lincoln Foundation #32, February, 1941), pp. 1-7.
[106]Barton, *Paternity*, p. 265.
[107]Coleman, *Coles County*, p. 53-54.
[108]Thomas, *Abraham Lincoln*, p. 6.
[109]Coleman, *Coles County*, p. 53.
[110]Warren, Louis A., "The Filial Relationship of Thomas and Abraham Lincoln," *Lincoln Lore*, #1263, (Fort Wayne, The Lincoln National Life Foundation, June, 1953).
[111]Barton, *Paternity*, p. 265.
[112]Coleman, *Coles County*, p. 55.
[113]Coleman, D.H., *Thomas Lincoln*, p. 34.
[114]Coleman, *Coles County*, p. 50.
[115]*Ibid.*, p. 53.
[116]Coleman, *Notes*, "The Parents of Abraham Lincoln," by William Barton in the *Charleston Daily Courier Print*, 1922, pp. 5-6.
[117]Warren, *Parentage and Childhood*, p. 45.
[118]Coleman, *Coles County*, p. 132.
[119]*Ibid.*, p. 53.
[120]*Ibid.*, p. 52.
[121]Coleman, *Notes, Lerna Weekly Eagle*, April 25, 1930, p. 17.
[122]Warren, *Parentage and Childhood*, p. 133.
[123]Barton, *Paternity*, p. 271.
[124]Warren, *Parentage and Childhood*, p. 56-57.
[125]Barton, *Abraham Lincoln*, p. 6-7.
[126]Tarbell, Ida., *The Life of Abraham Lincoln*, (New York: McClure, Phillips & Co., 1926), p. 14.

[127]Current, Richard, *The Lincoln Nobody Knows*, p. 25.
[128]*Ibid.*, p. 26.
[129]Warren, *Lincoln's Youth — Indiana Years*, p. 86.
[130]Tarbell, *Abraham Lincoln*, p. 18.
[131]Vannest, Charles G., *Lincoln The Hoosier*, (St. Louis, Eden Publishing, 1928), p. 5.
[132]Clark, L. Pierce, *Lincoln: A Psycho-Biography*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), p. 154.
[133]Coleman, *Coles County*, p. 154.

V. Postscript

"Grandma is gettin very feeble. Since I wrote last (on December 10, 1866) I have visited her and found her quite sick," Harriet Chapman wrote William Herndon in January, 1867.[134] Sarah Bush Lincoln would live two more years and die at the Lincoln homestead at Goosenest Prairie. In time, she would rest side-by-side with her husband in Shiloh Cemetery. She had outlived Thomas by eighteen years and, by the time of her death, she had lost two children–John D. Johnston (1854) and Sarah Eliabeth Johnston Hanks (1864). Her other daughter, Matilda had buried two husbands: Squire Hall (1851) and Reuben Moore (1859). Her stepdaughter-in-law, Mrs. Mary Todd Lincoln, had had her own share of grief. Eddie had died in Springfield (1850), Willie succumbed to illness in the White House (1862) and Abraham had been assassinated (1865). Only Thomas (Tad), named for his grandfather, and Robert remained. Two years later (1871) Thomas expired. Even old Dennis Hanks could not escape a tragic death. On October 21, 1892, 93-year-old Dennis, nearly blind, while attending "Emancipation Day" in Paris, Illinois, was run over by a team of horses and fatally injured.[135]

Nor did the Lincoln cabin survive the century. Sold and resold many times, it ultimately was purchased by a group known as the "Abraham Lincoln Log Cabin Association", disassembled and moved to Chicago for the World's Fair of 1893. After the Fair it was taken apart, stored in the Libby Prison yard, never reclaimed, and probably was used for firewood.[136] A replica of the cabin lived in by Thomas Lincoln and his family stands in the park today.

[134]Coleman, *Coles County*, p. 155.
[135]*Ibid.*, p. 232.
[136]*Ibid.*, p. 47.

***EDITOR'S NOTE:** This paper on Thomas Lincoln originally was prepared, largely from the notes of Dr. Charles Coleman, by eleven graduate students under the supervision of Eastern Illinois University History Professors, Lavern M. Hamand and Donald F. Tingley, in the 1970's. At the suggestion of Daniel Thornburgh, EIU Professor of Journalism, and with the encouragement and suggestions of Mr. Val Coleman, Dr. Charles Coleman's son, the* Research and Review Series *editorial committee decided to publish the paper. The committee asked Professor Robert W. Sterling, EIU History Department, to undertake the task of revising and editing and he most graciously consented. Professor Sterling deserves much of the praise and credit for the final product. Robert W. Sterling, a native of central Illinois, is a Professor of History at Eastern Illinois University where he teaches courses on Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War. Professor Sterling earned his B.S., 1951, and M.S., 1959, degrees from Eastern Illinois University and has done graduate work at the University of Chicago, University of Illinois and the University of New Hampshire. He joined the EIU History Department in 1957. He is an active member of the Illinois State Historical Society, American Political Items Collectors Organization, Confederate Historical Institute and the Coles County Historical Society. "Civil War Desertion from Illinois Units," published in the* Illinois Historical Journal, *is one of several recent works on Lincoln and the Civil War.*

Dan M. Hockman, RRS.

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In Memory of Charles Coleman
by Val Coleman

Thomas Lincoln, Abraham Lincoln's father, always seemed to have an upstairs bedroom in our house in Charleston, Illinois. He joined us for supper and occupied my father for hours and hours in his study, so placed in the house that when Dad was at work (with both doors closed) you had to go through the bathroom to make it from the living room to the kitchen.

My parents had come to Illinois in the middle 1920s, Dad to take a teaching post as a professor of history at Eastern Illinois University, and Mom to reorganize the middle west. Dad's eye fell upon the trek of the Lincoln family from Indiana to Coles County, Illinois in 1830 and his meticulous scholarship (honed under Allan Nevins at Columbia University in New York City) soon set the standard for Lincoln scholarship in the state.

Of all the Charlie Coleman stories (and they are legion), my favorite is the story of the Christmas morning when the family (as a joke) gave him a brand new copy of the recently-published one-volume Carl Sandburg biography of Abraham Lincoln. Without losing a beat, Dad disappeared into the holy of holies (his study) and we heard the sound of file drawers sliding open and shut. In five minutes, he returned to the expectant family and announced, "Well, he only made four mistakes on the first page."

Thomas Lincoln, the President's oft-maligned and unseen father fascinated Dad. It is said that more books have been written about our sixteenth President than any other human being with the possible exception of Jesus Christ. And yet no one has written a biography of his father. The conventional wisdom (pre-Charlie Coleman) was that Tom Lincoln was a loser, a failed farmer and a bankrupt who was chased out of Kentucky and Indiana by the sheriff. (Dad called such historians "Sheriffians"). The truth, once it was uncovered in a dozen courthouse basements and other archives by my father, was that Tom Lincoln was a hardworking and successful farmer, a fine carpenter and a brave and industrious father.

When my Dad first became ill in 1955, he had finished two decades of research and started the writing of the Thomas Lincoln biography. My father's whole life, his careful scholarship, his passion for accuracy and his love of the Lincoln family was to be summarized in this exoneration

of Abraham Lincoln's father. It never happened. Dad's illness was so debilitating that he was unable to complete the work.

But he left behind a carton of notes.

The preceeding essay on Thomas Lincoln has been prepared largely from my father's notes. I am most grateful that the effort has been made and that poor old Tom Lincoln can come down to supper now with his reputation intact.

***EDITOR'S NOTE:** Dr. Charles Coleman was Professor of History at Eastern Illinois University from 1926 to 1960. He was a widely acclaimed Lincoln Scholar and published a number of works on the Lincoln family. The citations in the essay on Thomas Lincoln attest to his extensive scholarship.*

At the Grave Of Thomas Lincoln

by Bruce Guernsey

January 31, 1861

(Here, finally, but how to speak to him? —
speeches, a life of speeches. I am sick of speeches.
No notes this time. Begin with the weather.)

Remember that winter, my Father, just a score
and eleven ago — I was twenty-one,
a man at last you said, though the ax
had long been hard in my hands —
that time, so cold, so deep the snow
our first winter in Illinois?
They laugh out East that I split rails but that
we did, didn't we, and Mother Sarah thought it fine,
the simple house she lives in still, the "Old Woman"
you sometimes called her, jealous of me, only her step-son . . .
Do you know how petty you could be, how cruel? —
how much at times I hated you? —
work! work! work!
that's all you ever did and scorned the books
I carried to the fields, a place to think
away from you, or dream a line of verse.
Poetry, Father, poetry and death, hand-in-hand:
my mother gone, Sister, little Eddy, you:

The friends I left that parting day
How changed, as time has sped!
Young childhood grown, strong manhood gray,
And half of all are dead.

I hear the loved survivors tell
How nought from death could save,
Till every sound appears a knell,
*And every spot a grave.**

My lines, Thomas, mine.
I wrote those, weak as they are,
but would you have listened? Did you care?
Enough!
I have not come to argue with your bones.
I am here today to tell you I have won.
In ten days Mary Lincoln and I
will leave this open land for Washington.
I have come, thus, with Sarah, to say good-by.
The nation quarrels and I need peace with you.
Peace, yes, and help, you and I, can we, please?
In my dreams, I see them, Father, the trenches like long graves,
the stilled eyes of young men, their mothers' pain,
how weak and fruitless any words of mine.
Ten years ago this month you were dying and I,
I sent a note instead of coming, a written thing
to one who could barely read or sign his name.
How cruel the irony, that bitter root . . .
I must go. Mother Sarah shivers by the carriage.
Gordon's Graveyard's cold,
no thaw so far this year, little snow.
Would you barter forgiveness for gratitude?
I mean, from sons to fathers, it's difficult,
you know, to say just what I mean —
I had some notes, a little speech to give —
what I'm trying to say is, thank you,
thank you for the ax I cursed you for,
for the facts of labor, its simple language.
This prairie is our home. Care for it. I will be back.

**Quoted from Abraham Lincoln's poem, "My childhood-home I See Again."*

Authors's Note: This poem was first published in *The Spoon River Quarterly* XVII (Summer/Fall 1992): 77-78.

***EDITOR'S NOTE:** Bruce Guernsey, a native New Englander, is a Professor of English at Eastern Illinois University where he teaches Creative Writing and 19th Century American Literature. A recipient of four Illinois Arts Council Literary Fellowships and a Creative Writing Fellowship from the NEA, Guernsey has published two full-length collections of poetry and seven chapbooks as well as over two hundred poems in magazines such as Poetry, American Scholar, and The Atlantic. In 1983-84 he received a Senior Fulbright Lectureship to Portugal and in the spring of 1991 was the Fulbright Visiting Poet to Greece. He was recently selected as the 1992-93 Distinguished Professor by the Board of Governors Universities, the highest award that system offers. Guernsey has two children and lives in the country outside Charleston.*

Travelers and Settlers in Coles and Edgar Counties in the 1830's and 1840's: Tough People for Tough Times

by Calvin N. Smith

Though life may not be perfect for present residents of Coles and Edgar counties, it is almost idyllic when compared to the lot faced by those who travelled through or settled there in the 1830's and 1840's. In those days, pioneers met nature on her own harsh terms. Men worked in fields holding dangers unknown to us today. Their wives ventured into the "valley of the shadow of death" to bring infants into the world under the most primitive conditions. And children faced dreaded diseases like whooping cough, scarlet fever, consumption [tuberculosis], measles and mumps, all of which could have dire or even fatal consequences.

When Illinois became a state in 1818, the area now encompassing Coles and Edgar counties was raw frontier land. The previous spring (1817) John Stratton, Remember Blackman, Anthony Sanders, William Whitley and Aloysius Brown all located on land that would later become part of Edgar County, and they are acknowledged as the area's first white settlers.[1] The county itself was carved out of Crawford County in 1823 and the new entity was named after the Honorable John Edgar, who was one of the first three judges of what was then known as Illinois County when Illinois was part of the vast holdings of the state of Virginia. The governor who approved the formation of Edgar County was Edward Coles, Illinois' second chief executive. Little did Coles realize that in 1830 the land directly west of Edgar County would be organized into a county named in his honor.

The 1879 *History of Coles County* indicates there was no great rush to settle what was to become Coles County. Its authors note: "Prior to 1824, what is now Coles County was a wilderness waste uninhabited by civilized man. If any pale-face before that time had ever come within its borders as an actual settler, it is not known when he came, who he was or whither he went."[2] The first log cabin in the area was built by Benjamin Parker in Hutton Township and was completed during the fall and spring of 1824-25. It was a primitive building with a dirt roof, but it was home to both the Parker and Samuel Kellogg families; fourteen souls in all.[3]

Most of the early settlers in both counties were farmers. They pursued their vocation with vigor, though at times it was perilous work. William

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 230.
[4]William Lewis Nida, *The Story of Illinois and Its People*, Chicago: O. P. Barnes, 1910, p. 135.
[5]*Ibid.*, pp. 145-146.
[6]*Ibid.*, p. 146.
[7]*Ibid.*, p. 147.
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[9]*Ibid.*,
[10]*Ibid.*, pp. 232-233.
[11]*History of Edgar County*, p. 548.
[12]Cited by Charles Edward Wilson in the *Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois and History of Coles County*, Chicago: Munsell Publishing Co., 1906, p. 621.
[13]Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, Vol. II, Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1951 ed., p. 71. The Company Smith led was joined by others until it numberd 222, including 11 women and 7 children.
[14]James L. Bradley, *Zion's Camp 1834: A Prelude to Civil War*, Publisher's Press, 1990, p. 83.
[15]Smith, p. 71.
[16]*Ibid.*, pp. 71-72.
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[23]Wayland Debs Hand, *Magical Medicine*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980, p. 87.
[24]*Ibid.*, p. 102.
[25]*Ibid.*, p. 88.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Calvin N. Smith was raised in southeastern Idaho and received his undergraduate degree from Idaho State College in 1960. He earned his Master's degree from SIU-Carbondale in 1961. In 1965 he obtained his Ph.D. from Purdue University with a major in Speech and minors in Speech Pathology and American History. He is currently a professor of Speech-Communication at Eastern Illinois University where he has taught for the past 28 years. During that time he has received three Outstanding Teacher awards. He has also written numerous articles and papers on topics ranging from local to international concern. He served as co-editor and also authored four chapters in the forthcoming book* Abraham Lincoln and the Western Territories *which will be published in late-1993 by the Nelson-Hall Publishing company of Chicago.*

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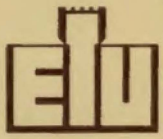

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