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Lincoln, the Hoosier : a restatement of some facts that too many folks seem to have forgotten

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LINCOLN THE HOOSIER





2922 Morgan



The Hoosier Lincoln learning wisdom between the furrows of the field.

LINCOLN THE HOOSIER

A restatement of some
facts that too many folks seem
to have forgotten



T. T. Frankenberg

*An honest tale speeds best,
being plainly told.*

—SHAKESPEARE



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Foreword

This text, prepared so that the people of Indiana may know how great is their claim upon the history of Abraham Lincoln, would have been impossible without the cooperation of Dr. Louis A. Warren of Zionsville, whose work on Lincoln has already attracted national attention. Dr. Warren freely placed at the disposal of the writer the results of his original research in Indiana. This he has been years in making. His work will be published shortly in a generous volume. The historical accuracy of every statement herein is attested by Dr. Warren, who has read and approved the text.

This is important, as students recognize that there are a number of disputed points in the career of Abraham Lincoln. For the purpose of this booklet, it was important that no statement be made that could not be substantiated.

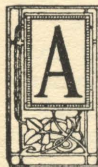
The illustrations are all pen drawings made at the various localities in Indiana which Lincoln is known to have visited. They are the work of Miss Constance Forsyth of Indianapolis. Like the text, their first mission was to be authentic. It is thought that they will add materially to an appreciation of this story, whose purpose is to substantiate the claim that Lincoln was a Hoosier.

No attempt has been made to write a complete history of the life of Abraham Lincoln in Indiana.

T. T. F.

Abraham Lincoln

The Hoosier



ABRAHAM LINCOLN, the sixteenth President of the United States, came to Indiana when he was between seven and eight years of age. With his parents, Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks Lincoln, and his sister Sarah, he became a citizen of the state in the year 1816. Indiana remained his home until 1830. The fourteen years covering the most impressionable period of a man's life were spent in Indiana. Lincoln was a Hoosier. This is steadily gaining in recognition.

The Lincoln family left Kentucky because continual conflict over land titles made success in farming very difficult. They also wanted to get away from slavery. Contrary to a belief which has been current, Thomas Lincoln had not been

poverty stricken before he came into Indiana. He could not be called wealthy. He and his family had such rude comforts as were common in their locality in their time.

The Ohio River is wide and moves in stately fashion at the point where young Lincoln first made its acquaintance. A clumsy raft-like craft, propelled by man power, made its slow way to the Indiana shore and landed at the mouth of Anderson Creek. The little town of Troy flourished near this site. Later it was to pass almost into oblivion.

A couple of horses, possibly a cow, a few farm implements, and simple rude household utensils made up the Lincoln belongings. Up the creek a way, overland, and into the state the family moved. They were following a rude trail through primitive forest. The Indians had gone before them, and before the Indians, the buffaloes. The fine and finished roads which now furnish quick means of travel to thousands were a long, long way in the future.

The Lincolns reached Indiana between



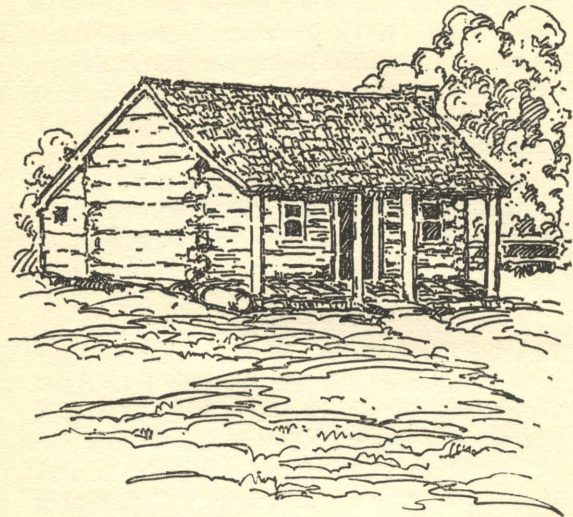
A scene at the mouth of Anderson Creek where Lincoln as a boy first touched Indiana.

Thanksgiving and Christmas. It was a new trip for the mother, the son, and the daughter. The father had been there some

time before. He had staked out a quarter section of land. He raised a pile of brush on the four corners of his 160 acres to indicate to any chance passerby that it had been claimed under the laws of the time. Later he was to go to Vincennes where the Federal Land Office was located, and to secure a patent for his holdings.

A rude log hut was hurriedly constructed before the mild winter of Southern Indiana could make life too uncomfortable. Even at this tender age, for Abraham was not eight until February 12 of the following year, an ax was put into his hands. Lincoln tells about this in a sketch which he wrote in 1860. Rails which he split as a young man played an important part in his election to the Presidency, so it is small wonder that he tells this fact among the few acts of his youth, which he thought important.

The Lincoln farm lies in what is now Spencer County, about seventeen miles north of the Ohio River. Lincoln City now covers practically the entire tract of land for which Thomas Lincoln got a gov-



The Hoosier cabin home of Abraham Lincoln from a drawing made in 1860 while the cabin was still standing.

ernment patent some ten years after he had settled.

Indiana became a state of the Union the same year that the Lincolns came to live in it. While the low rolling hills which

they selected for their home were covered with virgin forest, there was a considerable number of people living in the state at that time. In 1820 the state had almost 150,000 people, largely clustered along the Ohio River.

The first two years of Abraham's life in Indiana were of great importance to him. They were the last two years he was to know the guiding influence of his mother. Nancy Hanks Lincoln was in her early thirties when the family moved to Indiana. She had been three times a mother. Her second son she had left sleeping in a Kentucky burying ground. Sarah was two years older than the future President.

Thanks to a few months at school, and to the efforts of the mother, Sarah and Abraham had learned to read and to write. The books in the simple home were indeed few, but they were of the sort which stamp their impress on a child's mind for life. First of all, was the Bible. Lincoln's writings and his speeches throughout his life show his familiarity with the Scriptures, which he first learned to read and to know at his mother's knee in Southern Indiana.



A typical trail through the woods near Lincoln City probably unchanged since the boy Lincoln was a familiar figure of that vicinity.

One of the sentiments of Lincoln most frequently quoted is, "All that I am or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother." This testimony he gave when in the White House.

The spring and summer of 1817 at least a portion of the farm was cleared and a small crop planted. At that time there was little in the way of diversion. It is safe to believe that many days and long days of labor were put in by father and son in the hard work of cutting down trees, using some of the logs in building the cabin, and in splitting up or otherwise disposing of the rest of them.

Only in the evening could the hours be given to reading and study. It was at such times that the quiet cabin was lighted into the night by shavings and pine knots, for even candles were not to be burned except on rare occasions. It is these hours that have delighted romancer and historian alike. Fancy pictures the mother smoothing the way as far as she might for the tall young son, whose ambition to know was so unusual, when compared with youths of the countryside. Probably

Nancy Hanks Lincoln never knew how well derived was her boy's love of knowledge. Only in late years has the Lincoln lineage been well established.

This mother who meant so much to the future President was one of several victims of an epidemic which laid its hand on the community in the fall of 1818. The disease was known as "milk sickness." It seems to have come from drinking milk from the animal which had eaten a poisonous plant. Its visitation was swift and terrible.

Nancy Hanks Lincoln was ill only a few days. She knew that death was near, so she called her children to her. She told them that she was going away and asked them to grow up trusting in God and loving one another.

Lincoln was always tender hearted. This trait did not desert him even in the trying days as President. One may imagine how his young heart grieved at the sudden death of his mother, and how his anguish was aggravated by the fact that he himself had to assist in all the preparations for the funeral. A rude coffin was

made from lumber cut out of logs by a whip-saw and put together with wooden pegs.

They buried Nancy Hanks Lincoln on a hill. It is a mark of respect which people in simple times always have paid to their dead—to bury them on the top of a hill. There was no ceremony at the house; there was no ceremony at the grave. This was not through any lack of respect, not to any lack of desire. There were few preachers in the country in those days. In that sad hour none was at hand.

Young as he was, Abraham felt the need and the propriety of some memorial ceremony. He contrived a letter to a preacher he had known in Kentucky, asking that he come to their home and preach a sermon in memory of his mother.

It was not until the following spring that this was possible. In the meantime the dread malady had claimed several other victims and there were other mounds clustered around that of Nancy Lincoln, on the knoll about a quarter of a mile to the south of where the cabin stood. Friends gathered 'round from all the coun-



An artist's conception of the funeral services of Nancy Hanks Lincoln conducted several months after her burial in the fall of 1818.

tryside. They could not know that in years to come men and women from all parts of the world would stand with heads uncovered, above this simple grave, and pay a silent tribute to the memory of the mother and her remarkable son. The simple recognition of Nancy Hanks Lincoln by friends and neighbors on that day has become a nation-wide tribute in this.

The death of his mother was the first of many tragedies that cast a lengthening shadow across Lincoln's life. As a healthy boy he recovered in time the natural poise of his mind, but at intervals, as long as he lived, he had moods of deep melancholy.

There was a period during which his sister made a valiant struggle to take the place of her mother. Probably she did not quite succeed in the management of household affairs. It is certain, however, that brother and sister continued to live as their mother had prayed they might.

The up-hill struggle continued about a year and then Thomas Lincoln returned for a brief visit to Kentucky. When he came back he brought a new wife, Sarah Bush Lincoln, who had been previously



A sketch of what is called "The Lincoln Mill" near his Indiana home.

the face of American history was an accident to Abraham which occurred when he was kicked by a horse he was riding at a mill to which he had carried some grain to be ground. He was unconscious for a long while and there seems to have been some doubt whether or not he would recover.

From time to time there were a few short weeks of school. Lincoln says that nothing more than a knowledge of reading, writing, and an ability to cipher to the rule of three, ever was expected. Anyone who knew the least bit of Latin was considered a marvel. All accounts make out Lincoln to have been exceptionally quick as a student. He says that his schooling scarcely amounted to a year, taken all together. Yet he did learn to read, wrote an unusually good hand, and had more than an average knowledge of mathematics.

As time went on, he borrowed every book of which he heard. The earlier books which he read included, besides the Bible, Aesop's Fables, Murray's English Reader, Pilgrim's Progress, Robinson Crusoe, and later Weem's Life of Washington, History

of the United States, and a book of the Revised Statutes of the State of Indiana. None of these hardly could be called exciting. All, however, were a fine background for the more diversified reading he was to do later in life.

What was decidedly unusual in those days, was a teacher who attempted to give lessons in manners and deportment, as well as in reading and writing. Long years afterward, they delighted to tell stories about Lincoln's awkwardness in attempting to make himself to do what were considered the polite things in those days.

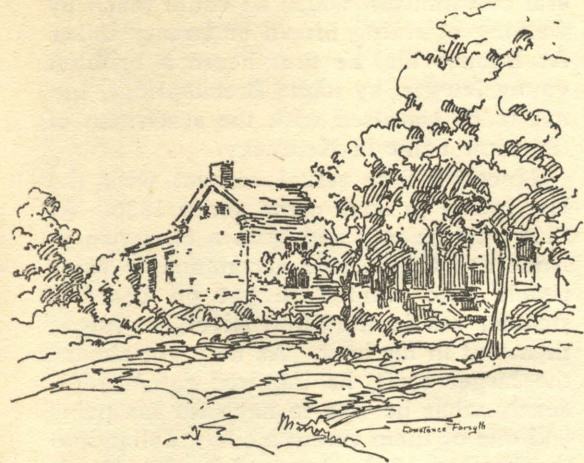
As Lincoln grew older and the farm, with the aid of the boys, got into better shape, Abraham's services were required by other neighbors. The usual wage for this sort of work was \$.25 a day. Thomas Lincoln had been a carpenter as well as a farmer in Kentucky, and at least some of the skill he tried to pass on to his son.

Thus, whether it was splitting rails, or acting as a carpenter, or plowing the field, Lincoln's services were in good demand. It is during this period that they tell stories of his reading books between plow-

ing rows of corn or later at night by the light of shavings, after others had gone to bed. There are still in Southern Indiana cabins for which Lincoln is supposed to have hewn the logs, sawed the floors, or built part of the furniture. Research has proved that many of these claims are more or less imaginary. Very little of the original Lincoln-day construction now remains.

The very shores on which Lincoln landed in Indiana have been washed into the middle of the Ohio. The several court-houses which he visited as a boy, Boonesville, Rockport, and Troy, have burned or been pulled down. Here and there are trees, particularly cedars, of sufficient age that Lincoln may have seen them. At Rockport the noble sandstone bluffs that rise more than a hundred feet from the river's edge must be today as Lincoln saw them, for they have not changed in hundreds of years.

As a boy of fourteen years, Lincoln began to imitate the preachers and public speakers he had heard. His playmates used to get him to make stump speeches.



The site of Jones' store and first Indiana school attended by Lincoln near Gentryville.

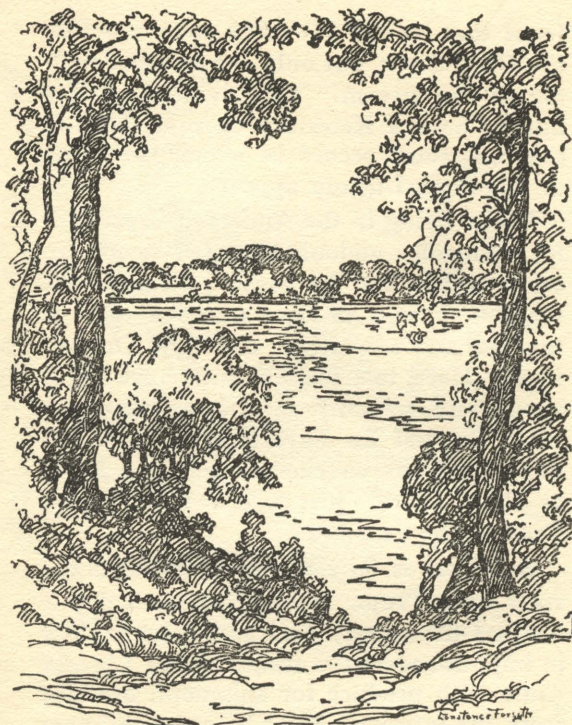
At that early age he began to talk against cruelty to animals and to men. Before he left Indiana, he had made speeches in favor of temperance, and written an article on it for a publication in Ohio.

As he grew older, Lincoln showed a great interest in the proceedings at the sev-

eral courthouses, which he could reach by walking or riding fifteen or twenty miles. At Boonesville, he first heard a brilliant young lawyer, by name Breckenridge, but not to be confused with the statesman of the same name in Kentucky.

Lincoln's first actual contact with the law seems to have come about 1826. At that time he was acting as a ferryman at Anderson Creek. To accommodate some people who wanted to get on board a steamer out in the Ohio River, he rowed them out in his boat. As they got aboard the larger craft, he inquired rather diffidently what he was to have for his pains and one of them threw a silver dollar into the bottom of the boat. Lincoln says it was the largest sum he had ever received for himself up to that time.

The event, however, was not to be without its sting. Lincoln was served with papers from a Kentucky Justice of Peace. He was charged by the Dill Brothers with operating a ferry without a license. The case is recorded in the Kentucky courts. Lincoln seems to have been his own attorney and to have gone free on the de-

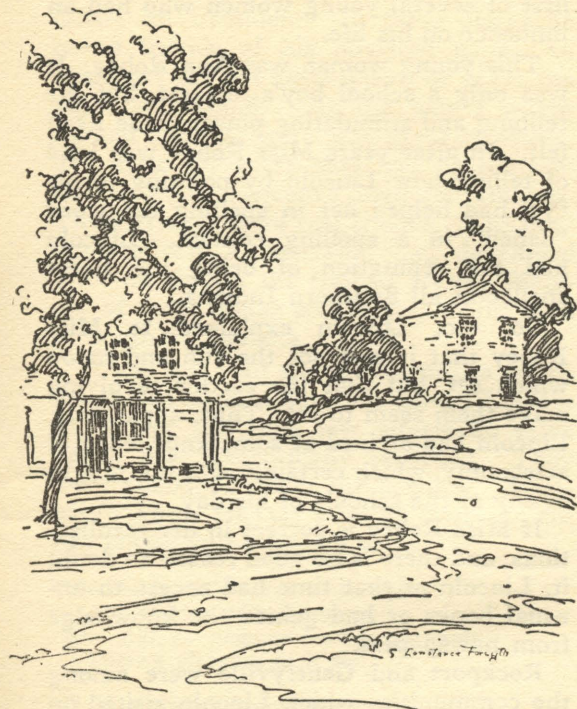


Site of the ferry landing at Rockport where Lincoln embarked for his first flat boat trip to New Orleans.

fense that he did not ferry anyone across the Ohio River, but only out into the middle of the stream. This did not require him to have a Kentucky license. This is the first court record in which the name of Abraham Lincoln appears.

While living in the Anderson Creek valley, Lincoln undoubtedly cut wood to serve as fuel for the passing steam-boats. He also is said to have raised a crop of tobacco and sold it for the New Orleans trade. Here, too, Lincoln must have heard about and possibly may have seen the great General La Fayette. For La Fayette's boat was wrecked in the Ohio River at Rock Island, just a few miles above Troy in the year 1825.

Rockport is only a few miles down the river from Troy. During Lincoln's day it became the county seat and grew rapidly in importance as the result. Here Lincoln came with produce for shipment, brought from the interior. Here he came to know one of the great lawyers of his day, John Pitcher. Here also he came to know the



Gentryville as it must have been during Lincoln's young manhood.

first of several young women who had an influence on his life.

This young woman was Ann Robey. It was only a school boy's interest, but the refining and stimulating power made itself felt. In after years Miss Robey was fond of telling how Lincoln by pointing to his eye, had helped her in spelling the word "defied" in a spelling contest. Lincoln had the reputation of being the finest speller in all Southern Indiana.

So, too, Lincoln explained to Miss Robey that it was not the sun and moon which set, but that the earth's revolving make them seem to set. Thus, apparently, Lincoln had arrived at some knowledge of astronomy, which certainly was not taught in any of the schools of his day.

If Miss Robey is correct in her recollections, and there is no good reason to doubt it, Lincoln at that time had access to unusual books or had gained the knowledge from newspapers.

Rockport and Gentryville were among the communities which Lincoln visited on his return to Indiana in 1844. He was then making speeches for Henry Clay, can-

didate for President. In these places he found friends of his boyhood days. In Rockport the old hotel where he spent the night still stands. At the points where he had friends, there was great rejoicing. The fourteen years that had passed had not lessened Lincoln's love for Indiana. Those friends were real friends. The boyhood efforts at speaking had developed into the skill of the trained orator. Memory of these things still lingers in the hills of Southern Indiana.

It was this visit and the memories which it brought back to him that moved Lincoln to one of the very few efforts at verse which are authentically recorded. They were published under the heading, "Memory." These stanzas selected from the entire poem, will show its trend:

"My childhood's home I see again,
And sadden with the view;
And still, as memory crowds my brain,
There's pleasure in it too.

O Memory! thou midway world
'Twixt earth and paradise,
Where things decayed and loved ones lost
In dreamy shadows rise,

And, freed from all that's earthly vile,
Seems hallowed, pure, and bright,
Like scenes in some enchanted isle
All bathed in liquid light.

As leaving some grand waterfall,
We, lingering, list its roar—
So memory will hallow all
We've known, but know no more.

Near twenty years have passed away
Since here I bid farewell
To woods and fields, and scenes of play,
And playmates loved so well.

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 range the fields with pensive tread,
And pace the hollow rooms,
And feel (companion of the dead)
I'm living in the toms."

Finally, it was at Rockport that the first great adventure of his life became possible. He was engaged by a neighbor to assist his son to take a flatboat down to New Orleans. Even today, with towns and villages along the entire route, this is a considerable trip not without adventure.

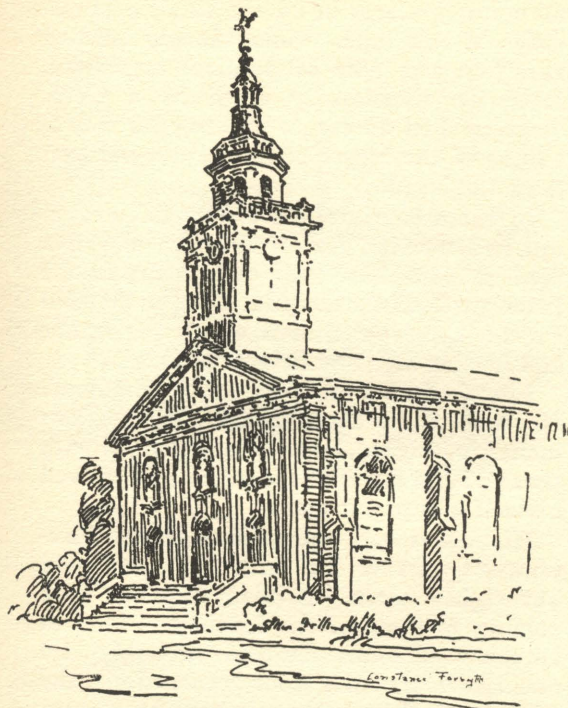


Scene of the old grave yard at Little Pigeon church, the burial place of Sarah, sister of Abraham Lincoln.

How much more thrilling must it have been in the days before 1830, when the only means of propelling the boat were a couple of hand sweeps and when for days together, they might not see anyone with whom they could exchange greetings.

This is the trip when Lincoln made that first-hand acquaintance with slavery and particularly with the selling of slaves, which made him the undying foe of that institution until he was able to do away with it by the "Emancipation Proclamation." Of slavery he was later to say, "If I ever get a chance to hit that thing, I will hit it hard."

One of the points of influence in Lincoln's life while he lived as a citizen of Indiana has now completely passed away. This was the settlement known as Jonesboro, about two and one-half miles from the Lincoln cabin. Here was a store, and here was a school; and one of the cross-state roads passed near by. To the store and one close by at Gentryville, in the evening came the men and boys of the neighborhood. Here gossip was exchanged. Here public questions were debated as in



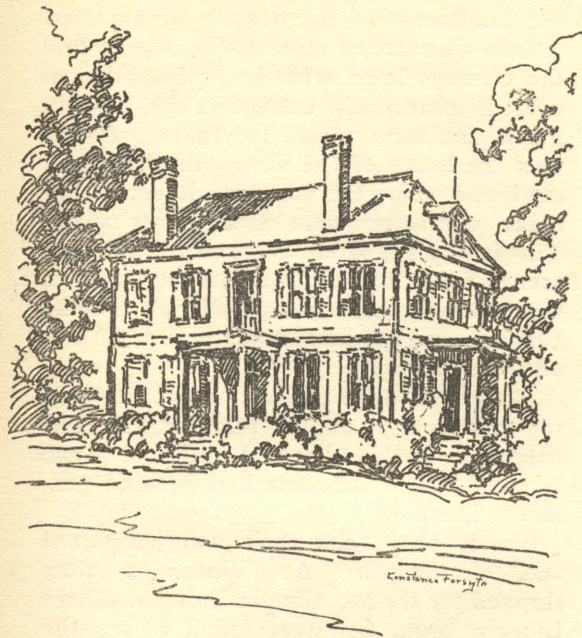
The old cathedral at Vincennes, one of the last bits of Indiana seen by Lincoln as he crossed the Wabash for the Illinois shore in 1830. It still stands.

all country stores in all the small communities of this land. Here Lincoln learned the give and take of political argument. Here he occasionally acted as a clerk. Here he had access to the regular newspapers of the larger communities, particularly Louisville.

In the meantime, his sister had grown up, had married Aaron Grigsby, and had died in 1828. Her body rests today in the little yard of the Baptist Church at Old Pigeon Creek—a church which her father and her brother had helped to build.

Lincoln had almost grown to manhood. He was, as he says, almost six feet four inches in height. In trials of strength with those of his age and older, he had proved himself a superior man.

His father had relinquished to the Government part of his farm and now held but eighty acres. Brilliant reports were coming to them of the fertility of land in Illinois. Thomas Lincoln probably did not know that for four generations the Lincolns had been born in one state, married in another, and died in a third. Thomas Lincoln was only preparing for



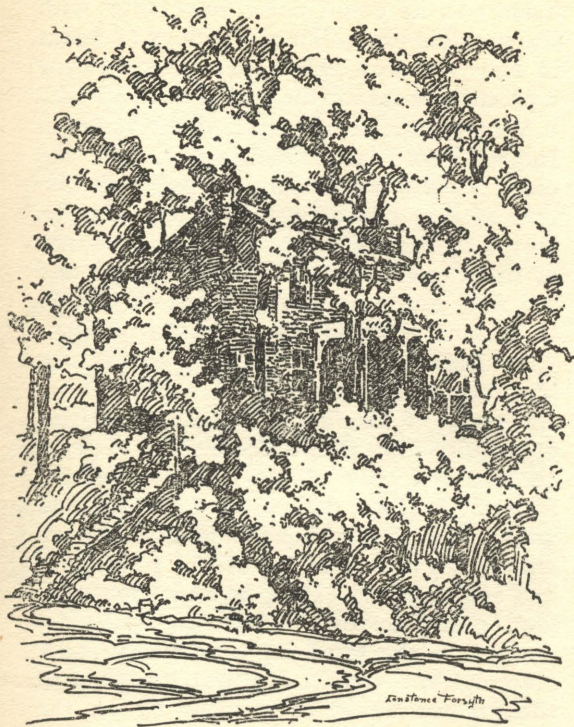
The William Henry Harrison mansion at Vincennes as it looks today and as it looked in 1830 to Lincoln enroute to his new Illinois home.

the fulfillment of the destiny of his race.

So a contract of sale was drawn up and the Gentrys later came into possession of what is historically known as the Lincoln Farm, the farm which for fourteen years was the home of the sixteenth President, the home where the various influences that make character were steadily at work. The family prepared to leave the familiar scenes and the little knoll to the south of the cabin, where sleeps Nancy Hanks Lincoln, and her neighbors, victims of that peculiar malady.

A team of oxen and an ox-cart sufficed for the family on its pilgrimage. The neighbors gathered round and said a sad farewell. The Lincolns had become genuinely liked.

Slowly they took their way westward and northward. At Vincennes they stopped for the last time in Indiana. There Lincoln could not have failed to see the new cathedral, its tall thin spire standing out high above all the other buildings of that time. Here also he must have visited the home of General William Henry Harrison, a building of such magnificence and

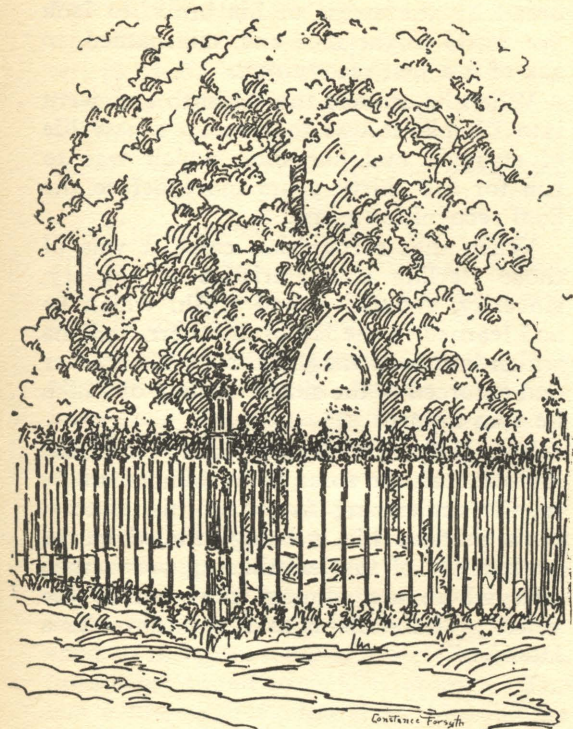


Old house at Rockport where Lincoln stopped when he returned to Indiana in 1844.

beauty as he could never have seen with the possible exception of the days he spent in New Orleans. Here, certainly, he saw a printing press for the first time in his life.

Vincennes also was the oldest town in Indiana that Lincoln had ever visited. He could hardly have known the romantic history of that city except in a general way. But it is such a place and such a history as must have kindled his imagination and left with him a fine and permanent picture of Indiana as he passed out of it in 1830.

In Indiana he was leaving behind the burial spot of his mother. He was leaving the scene of his first efforts at labor and at scholarship. Here he had hewn great timbers and split rails. Here he had delivered his first addresses; here he had written his first articles; here he had become imbued with his first ambitions of service and achievement. Here he had known his first great sorrow. Here he had first thrilled to the touch of a woman's hand. Here he had caught his first glimpses of the greater world as it went by on the bosom of the great Ohio. Here he had learned to labor and to wait, to earn his



The quiet grave of Nancy Hanks Lincoln showing the simple stone erected by P. E. Studebaker in 1879.

bread by the sweat of his brow, to look the world in the face and, unashamed, to ask of it a just recognition.

When he crossed the Wabash and went into Illinois, it was to take up a new life of struggle and hardship, which was to run for full thirty years more before the final recognition came.

When that recognition came it was of those sterling characteristics of honesty, sincerity, simplicity, and truth, which he had learned in the lap of Southern Indiana which had been taught him by his mother and enforced in the simple society of which he was a part.

The glory of Lincoln's achievements as a statesman for some years blinded many to the underlying forces of his history. Now that his life is being studied in the perspective of the lengthening years, men everywhere are coming to recognize the validity of the claim that "Lincoln was a Hoosier."

THOSE who have greatly achieved, are those who have responded to character, to ideals, to truth and to convictions. Character, ideals, and convictions come in youth. The man who does not love truth, honor, virtue, patience, and zeal from early manhood is not guided by them in trying hours of supreme need that come in after years. Men may gain knowledge in later life, but a passion for the virtues comes only in the days of youth.

Character made Lincoln great. His character received its definite bend and form from the influences that surrounded him in the State of Indiana. The impress of home, of mother, and of kin; the hold of nature and of out-of-doors; the influence of books; the power of friendships and associations; and the first strong call of the great world left their lines upon his soul while it was wax. When it had hardened to the grim need of after years those lines were found graven in granite. The world knows and admires in Lincoln the virtues he learned in the lap of Southern Indiana.

Few mothers who have made history have been so badly treated by that history as the mother of Abraham Lincoln. America observes almost as a legal holiday what it knows as Mother's Day. Yet in the recognition which made enduring history, America does little. No encyclopedia, no stated book of reference, so much as lists the name of Nancy Hanks Lincoln. Enshrined in the simple glowing tribute of her son, "All that I am or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother," there is a tribute which authors and writers have embroidered into books.

But what she did to glorify all motherhood and what it means to give a man-child to the world that the world may be a better place in which to live, still is without recognition as the world has come to term "recognition." When Indiana, claiming her own, honors Lincoln and couples with this honor due recognition of her who shaped his mind and body to the purpose of Almighty God, recognition of motherhood will have a new meaning not only in Indiana but in the whole wide world.

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