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Louis A. Warren - Editor

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A JUNE WEDDING

The parents of Abraham Lincoln were married in June. Just one hundred and twenty-three years ago from the date of this bulletin, Thomas Lincoln certified his intention of marrying Nancy Hanks by securing the necessary marriage bond. Two days after the bond was issued, the wedding ceremony was performed by Rev. Jesse Head on June 12, 1806. This was the last of five Lincoln weddings which had occurred in the Beech Fork community. The two older brothers of Thomas, Mordecai and Josiah, had married Mary Mudd and Catharine Barlow, respectively. His two sisters, Mary and Ann, were then Mrs. Ralph Crume and Mrs. William Brumfield, respectively.

These young people all mingled together in the same settlement in Washington County, Kentucky, and it was very natural that Thomas Lincoln should select as his bride, one of the girls who had played with his own sisters. Nancy Hanks dwelt in the Berry home, not far from the Lincoln's, while Thomas was growing up. She was an orphan child, relatives of the family claiming that her father James Hank died in Virginia. Her widowed mother, Lucy Shipley Hanks, upon reaching Kentucky married Henry Sparrow and began rearing a new family. It was probably at this time that Nancy went to live with her aunt, Rachel Shipley Berry, wife of Richard Berry, Sr.

The marriage bond, which was required before a wedding could be solemnized, called for the signature of the groom and some male representative of the bride. Usually the parent signed for the bride but in case of an orphan girl her guardian became her sponsor. Richard Berry, Jr., who twelve years before had married Polly Ewing, became the head of the Berry household. He signed the marriage bond of Thomas Lincoln as the "guardian" of Nancy Hanks. It was this home where Nancy had lived that was the scene of the Lincoln-Hanks nuptials. A section of the old double cabin has been preserved and is now standing at Harrodsburg, Kentucky, to which place it was removed several years ago.

It is to be regretted that the incidents leading up to this pioneer wedding have been confused with certain events which took place in the home of Thomas and Elizabeth Sparrow, where another orphan girl by the name of Nancy Hanks had

found a home. This last named Nancy was the youngest sister of Elizabeth Sparrow, and became the mother of Dennis Hanks. These exhibits help to identify these two different Nancy Hankses with the families and communities where they belong.

EXHIBIT NO. 1

Chicago, Ill., July 26, 1873.

Chas. Friend, Esq.,
Hodgenville, Ky.

My Dear Sir:

I take the liberty of introducing myself to you, as having formerly been the private Secretary of President Lincoln, deceased, from the time of his nomination until his death; and as the friend of the family I wish to make some inquiries through your kindness concerning the early history of President Lincoln's parents.

Mr. Robert T. Lincoln, son of the late President, whom I am visiting here for a day or two, has shown me a letter of yours under date of 26th June last, written to your Uncle, Mr. Dennis F. Hanks, which the latter forwarded to Mr. Robert T. Lincoln. In the letter you mention that Pres. Lincoln's father and mother were married by a Mr. Alexander McDougal and that a daughter of this preacher (Mrs. Elizabeth Middleton by name) is still living, who was present at the wedding.

Now I wish to inquire of you the address of Mrs. Middleton, and where she lives; her age now, and when the wedding occurred; and in short, all the details of the event, as fully as she may be able to recollect them.

Would it be possible for you to visit Mrs. Middleton and write down from her own words a full and complete statement of the whole affair, and ask her to sign and authenticate it in some formal manner?

And if you could do this for me, would you also please make as full inquiries as possible through her whether any record was ever made of this marriage, or whether the original license or some paper concerning it might not still be found among her father's papers or some record in some family Bible in the neighborhood.

If you will please take the trouble and time to do this for me, you will not only oblige myself and President Lincoln's family and friends here, but I would cheerfully reimburse you for any traveling or other expenses it might cause you.

Please address your reply to me here, care of Mr. Robert T. Lincoln, as I shall remain here in the West some two months, although my regular address is at Washington City according to the card I enclose.

Your obedient servant,

JNO. G. NICHOLAY.

Note: I knew, personally, the Charles Friend to whom this letter was addressed, and had several interviews with him. He never changed his opinion and held that the same Nancy Hanks, who was the mother of Dennis Hanks, was also the mother of Abraham Lincoln.—Editor.

EXHIBIT NO. 2

May 12, 1886.

Col. R. T. Durrett,
Louisville, Kentucky.

Dear Sir:

Mrs. Churchill said Aunt Betsy Middleton and Mrs. Whitehead, Mrs. Middleton's sister, told her that Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks were married at Mr. Todd's, who at that time was living about three miles southeast of Hodgenville on the Little South Fork of Nolin where old Betty Cessna lived. Nancy was at that time working for and living at Mr. Todd's and Thomas Lincoln was working for and living at Robert Hodgson's, then owner of Hodgen's mill. Rumor says that Nancy had one child before the marriage to Thomas Lincoln, a son, the father of whom was named Friend.

Yours truly,

A. M. BROWN.

Note: This excerpt from Brown's letter to Durrett indicates that the above Nancy Hanks, mother of Dennis Friend Hanks, was confused quite generally in Hardin County, with Nancy Hanks, the mother of Abraham Lincoln. Mrs. Middleton as shown in Exhibit No. 1, was present at this wedding which was performed by her father, Alexander McDougal, but she was mistaken in the name of the groom. Nancy Hanks and Thomas Lincoln, parents of Abraham Lincoln, were married by Jesse Head in Washington County and the duly authorized return is now on file in the court house of that county.—Editor.

EXHIBIT NO. 3

Murfreesboro, Tenn.,
Sept. 14, 1895.

Mrs. Hitchcock:

Your letter of the 3rd inst. was a pleasing surprise to me. Twenty-two years have elapsed since the letter to which you refer was written in vindication of Nancy Hanks who was the cousin of my grandmother. When young they were intimate as sisters and members of their Uncle Richard Berry's home in Washington County, Kentucky, until both were married. My grandmother was married first and Nancy Hanks five or six years later. . . . My letter was written in 1873. In 1877 I visited Kentucky and urged my Uncle Mitchell Thompson to have the old court house searched for the papers. At a later date he did go to Mr. Brooker, Clerk of Washington County, Springfield, the county seat and had the search made which resulted in the finding of the papers, the establishment of the legality of the marriage etc. Nancy Hanks' mother's name before marriage was Shipley and she was a Virginian. There were I think six sisters in the Shipley family but I only remember the names of the husbands of three, Richard Berry and Robert Mitchell, my grandfather, and Mr. Hanks, Nancy's father. . . .

Respectfully,

CHARLOTTE HOBART VAWTER.

Note: The original letter written by Mrs. Vawter appeared in the Louisville Courier of February 20, 1874. To her more than any other person is due the credit for the discovery of the marriage papers of President Lincoln's parents.—Editor.