

Lincoln Lore

Bulletin of the
**LINCOLN HISTORICAL RESEARCH
 FOUNDATION**
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POSTMASTER LINCOLN

The appointment of Abraham Lincoln as postmaster of New Salem, Illinois, on May 7, 1833, was his first recognition by the general public. The fact that his own political faith was not in harmony with the administration then in power must have assured him that he had gained the good-will of all his neighbors. This honor, following his election as a captain in the Black Hawk War and the very complimentary vote he received as a candidate for the legislature, proved that he had the faculty of making friends. This was a fundamental qualification if one were to succeed in pioneer politics.

While the appointment as postmaster did not come to Lincoln as a political favor for contributing to the success of the party, then directing the affairs of the government, the position did afford him some exceptional opportunities for paving the way toward his own political success. He came to know the entire population of that part of old Sangamon County which later became Menard County. He was usually the first one to make the acquaintance of new settlers who sought out the post office, that one point of general contact and information known in pioneer days.

Of still greater value than the purely local associations, was the privilege of reading the newspapers and periodicals that came to the post office. It gave him a wider reading than most citizens in the county and allowed him to keep advised on all sides of any public question. I recently discovered in the Morgan County court house at Jacksonville, Illinois, the record book of the postmaster at that place, which gives us a better knowledge than we have had before of the many journals in circulation in the state at the time Lincoln was postmaster, at New Salem. This old record book gives the titles of the papers and magazines and the names of the subscribers who received the publications between October, 1831, and December, 1832. Lincoln might be called a contemporary of the Jacksonville postmaster, as his term of office began five months after the filing of these records. On the back cover of the old book is this citation: "Samuel Hill for two letters 37½ cts." Hill was the postmaster whom Lin-

coln succeeded at New Salem. As Jacksonville and New Salem were not more than thirty-five miles apart, it is reasonable to conclude that most of the publications which went through one post office were circulated through the other. This issue of Lincoln Lore releases a list of these early newspapers and periodicals, most of which were made available to Lincoln while serving as postmaster of New Salem.

EARLY PUBLICATIONS

The following publications were delivered by the postmaster of Jacksonville, Illinois, to subscribers residing in Morgan County, Illinois, during the period between October 1, 1831, and December 31, 1832. The names of the subscribers and the amounts of postage they paid are also listed with the title of the publication in a book in the archives of the Morgan County courthouse.

Alarm, Beardstown Chronicle, Biblical Repository, Boston Recorder, Casket, Christian Advocate, Christian Messenger, Christian Watchman, Cincinnati American, Evangelist, Farmers Chronicle, Focus, Gospel Herald, Home Messenger, Illinois Herald, Home Missionary, Journal of Commerce, Kankawa Banner, Kentucky Gazette, Kentucky Reporter, Ladies Book, Lexington Observer, Liberal Advocate, Louisville Focus, Louisville Post Advertiser, Marietta Gazette, Millennial Harbinger, Missionary Reporter, Missionary Herald, Missouri Republican, National Intelligencer, National Preacher, New York Observer, New York Optic, New York Post, New York Spectator, Niles Register, Ohio Patriot, Old Countryman, Palmyra Central, Philadelphia Evening Post, Plough Boy, Presbyterian, Revivalist, Sangamon Journal, Southern Advocate, Spirit Pilgrims, Standard, St. Louis Republican, St. Louis Times, Sunday School Banner, Sunday School Journal, Susquehanna Democrat, Tennessee Herald, Theology, Vandalia Whig, Wayne Sentinel, Western Luminary, Western Pioneer, Youth's Friend.

REMINISCENCES

In 1896, Mr. Harvey L. Ross wrote his Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln for the editor of the Fulton Democrat. Ross' father, Ossian M. Ross, was postmaster at Havanah, Illinois, and also had charge of the transportation of mail from Springfield to Lewistown and return twice each week. Harvey Ross carried the mail on horseback, making deliveries at Sangamontown, Athens, New Salem, and Havanah. Four times each week he came in contact with Abraham Lincoln, the postmaster at New

Salem, often helping him sort the mail, and learned to know him well. The limited space on this broadside will not allow more than a few sentences which are taken directly from the reminiscences of Mr. Ross.

"When Mr. Lincoln got the appointment of postmaster he moved the post office to a small frame building about 16x20 feet in size with puncheon floor and chimney and fireplace. It was the same building in which he afterwards kept his store in connection with the postoffice. He also had the letter box used by Mr. Hill.

"All letters sent from any post office had to have with it what we called a waybill, and on this waybill was written the date, the postoffice it was sent from, the postoffice it was to go to, and the amount of the postage. Then the letter and waybill were wrapped in a piece of paper tied with a piece of twine and sent to its destination. All waybills sent or received by any postoffice had to be copied in a book kept for that purpose, and every three months copies of these waybills sent and received had to be sent to Washington. This was called the quarterly report.

"My father, who had the mail route from Springfield to Lewistown, received his pay for carrying the mail in postoffice orders from Washington on the postoffices along the route. The orders he got on the New Salem office, when Lincoln was the postmaster would amount to \$40 or \$50 a quarter. These orders were given to me to collect while I was carrying the mail. While some of these offices were not prepared to pay these orders when presented, and I had to call for the money time and time again, it was not so with Lincoln. His money was always on hand. He kept his postoffice money separate from his other money, and kept it in a blue stocking in a wooden chest that was under his counter.

"When Mr. Lincoln resigned the postoffice there was remaining in his hands some \$60 belonging to the government. It was six months before an agent came around to settle with him. When the agent presented the bill, Lincoln looked at it and said, 'Yes, sir, that is all right,' and went to his chest and hauled out that old blue stocking and poured the money down on the counter. The agent counted the picayunes, bits, and quarters and found that it agreed with his account to a cent. It was the same money Lincoln had taken in as postmaster. The agent said to him, 'You might as well have used this money as to have had it tied up in this old stocking.' 'No,' replied Mr. Lincoln, 'I never use money that does not belong to me.'"