

Lincoln Lore

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NANCY HANKS' BIRTH-PLACE

Hon. William G. Conley, governor of West Virginia, recently appointed a commission to determine the birth-place of Nancy Hanks, mother of Abraham Lincoln. Those chosen to make the investigation and report their findings to the legislature are Mrs. A. A. Pickering, Rowlesburg; Andrew Price, Marlinton; W. H. Barger, Keyser; Phil Conley, Charleston; and John M. Crawford, Parkersburg.

Due to the fact that the conclusions of this commission must involve some questions far more important than merely locating the probable site of Nancy Hanks' nativity, the decision to which they shall finally come is of vital interest to all Lincoln students. The chairman of the commission, Mr. Andrew Price, who is also president of the West Virginia Historical Society, has contributed his personal views on the subject, which appeared in *The Pocahontas Times*, of Marlinton, August 29, 1929. Some of his conclusions are as follows:

1. Nancy Hanks' father was George Washington.
2. Her mother was Lucy Hanks.
3. Her mother's parents were Joseph and Ann Lee Hanks.
4. She was born in the cabin of Joseph Hanks situated on Mikes Run in what is now Mineral County, West Virginia.
5. The date of her birth was sometime between the spring of 1782 and the spring of 1784.

There are but two statements over the signature of Abraham Lincoln which speak of his mother's origin or family connections. An alleged conversation between Herndon and Lincoln in 1850, touching on this subject, but not mentioned or recorded until after Lincoln's death, fifteen years later, cannot be considered an authoritative source.

Lincoln's Autobiographical Sketches

"He (Thomas Lincoln) married Nancy Hanks—mother of the present subject—in the year 1806. She also was born in Virginia; and relatives of her's of the name of Hanks, and of other names, now reside in Coles, in Macon, and in Adams counties, Illinois, and also in Iowa. . . . He is the same John Hanks who now engineers the 'rail enterprise' at Decatur, and is a first cousin to Abraham's mother." Autobiography prepared for Scripps in 1860.

"My parents were both born in Virginia, of undistinguished families—second families, perhaps I should say." Sketch prepared for Fell, in 1859.

It is the purpose of this broadside to present for the consideration of the commission some duly authorized public records which seem to be directly associated with the task before them. In attacking this problem it would seem wise to set aside, for the present at least, the great mass of conflicting traditions which bear upon this question. The only logical and safe approach should be made through duly authorized public records which speak with authority.

We are fortunate to find available documents which affirm the statement which Lincoln had made about the marriage of his parents, although he did not know such records existed. Jesse Head, the officiating clergyman, certified that on June 12, 1806, he joined together in the Holy estate of "Matrimony" Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks. Two days before this wedding the following marriage bond had been filed:

Lincoln-Hanks Marriage Bond

"Know all men by these presents that we, Thomas Lincoln and Richard Berry are held and firmly bound. . . . sealed with our seals and dated this 10th day of June 1806. The conditions of the above obligation is such that whereas there is a marriage shortly intended between the above named Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks, for which a license has been issued. . . ."

Thomas Lincoln (Seal)
Richard Berry (Seal)
gardin

Witness John H. Parrott

Washington County (Ky.) Court

An early Kentucky statute which required that a marriage license could only issue from the clerk of the county "where the female usually resides," should assure us that Washington county was the home of Lincoln's mother.

The most significant fact which this bond reveals is that a guardian signed the paper for Nancy Hanks as her representative. This allows us to conclude that she had not reached the age of twenty-one at the time the bond was issued. Her birth date, therefore, must have been later than June 10, 1785.

Richard Berry, who had qualified as guardian of Nancy Hanks, was apparently her "next of kin." The procedure in appointing a guardian in Kentucky was as follows: "The court shall pay proper attention to the following order of precedence in right, and not depart therefrom unless it deems that prudence and interest of the infant so require: First, the father. Secondly, the mother, if unmarried. Thirdly, the next of kin, giving preference to males."

The fact that Nancy Hanks had a named guardian at the time of her marriage should allow one to make certain deductions. The most likely

conclusion to draw would be that one of her parents was dead. If this were so, it is very evident that since her father was not named as her guardian it was he who had passed away. A further deduction is also possible; if the mother still survived, she had married again, which made her ineligible for the guardianship. This would involve the search for some record bearing the name of a Hanks woman who would answer the necessary requirements, chronologically, geographically, and socially. What are known as the Lucey Hanks marriage papers in Mercer county seem to comply with all these needs.

On April 30, 1790, John Bailey, a Baptist preacher, endorsed a marriage certificate made out to Henry Sparrow and Lucey Hanks stating that they had been "joined in matrimony", by him on the above date. Four days previous to this wedding the certificate had been issued by the clerk of Mercer county, and on the same day a marriage bond had been signed by Henry Sparrow and John Daniel, his brother-in-law. John Daniel also signed a certificate that Lucey Hanks was of age. On November 24, 1789, five months before her marriage, a Mercer county Grand Jury made the following presentment: "Lucey Hanks for Fornication." She was never brought to trial on this indictment, and, after her marriage to Henry Sparrow, the case was dismissed.

The most important of the Lucey Hanks papers is herewith presented verbatim:

Lucey Hanks Certificate

"I do Certify that I am of age and give my apprebation freely for henry Sparrow to git out Lisons this or enny other day given under my hand this day April 26th 1790."

Test (wido)oy
Robert michel Lucey
John berry Hanks

Mercer County (Ky.) Court

This certificate reveals that Lucey Hanks was over twenty-one years of age at the time of her marriage to Sparrow. Since no Hanks name appears as a witness or bondsman on any of the marriage documents, it is not likely that she was then associated with any Hanks family. The two men who served as witnesses to the above certificate were closely related to Richard Berry, the guardian of Nancy Hanks. John Berry was a brother of Richard and when he made his will in 1795 he named Richard Berry and Robert Mitchell the executors of his estate. The relation of Lucey Hanks to the Berry and Mitchell families is not made clear in these records, but her close association with them is evident. If we were positive about the maiden name of Lucey Hanks her contact with the Berry family and the guardianship of Nancy might be clarified.

There is one word in this certificate which satisfies me, that when Lucey

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