

# LINCOLN LORE

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## LINCOLN LORE

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### LINCOLN'S FIRST HOOSIER SCHOOLMASTER

We learn from two brief, biographical sketches, prepared by Abraham Lincoln about the time of his nomination for the Presidency, the names of his three Indiana school teachers and the status of education in the community where he lived at that time.

"Abraham went to A, B, C schools by litters kept successively by Andrew Crawford, Swaney, and Azel W. Dorsey. He does not remember any other."

This statement he prepared for Mr. Scripps, and the following paragraph for Mr. Fell:

"There were some schools, so-called, but no qualification was ever required of a teacher beyond 'readin, writing, and cipherin,' to the Rule of Three. If a straggler, supposed to understand Latin, happened to sojourn in the neighborhood, he was looked upon as a wizard."

We note that Lincoln not only named his school teachers but he named them in the order of their administrations. This would make it quite clear that Andrew Crawford was his first schoolmaster.

There has been some shifting of this order by Lincoln biographers in order to dramatize some of the settings in which they wished to place Abraham Lincoln, but the order which he used can be ably supported by documents which are available.

We are first introduced to Andrew Crawford by an estray notice which appeared in the *Western Sun* for December 19, 1818, which is signed by A. Crawford, Justice of the Peace:

"Taken up by Jesse Hoskins in Spencer County, Carter Township, a horse valued by George Lee and William Hoskins at \$40.00. A true copy from my estray book."

Jesse Hoskins was a neighbor of Thomas Lincoln and this places Andrew Crawford in the Lincoln community as early as December 19, 1818.

On January 20, 1819, Crawford performed the rites of matrimony for Joseph C. Wright and Dinah Pierce. As a Justice of the Peace he was often called upon by the young people of the community to serve in this capacity. The last wedding service he is known to have performed was for Robert Angel and Polly Richardson. This was on March 14, 1821.

Most of the young people married by Crawford during these years were from the Lincoln community, which indicates that his residence from December, 1818, to March, 1821, was in Carter Township, Spencer County.

The Spencer County census for 1820 contains the name of Andrew Crawford and lists him as between twenty-six and forty-five years of age. His wife, whose name we do not know, was between eighteen and twenty-six. They had two children, a son and a daughter, both under ten years of age.

The writer has made a careful search of the public records but finds no evidence of Andrew Crawford in Spencer County after the month of March, 1821. The implication is quite clear that he moved from the community about that time.

Evidently it was within this space of a little more than three years that he taught Abraham Lincoln. This is in agreement with Lincoln's own testimony that Crawford was his first Indiana school teacher.

One of the early biographers who interviewed Lincoln claimed that Lincoln did not attend school in Indiana until shortly after his father married his second wife. The wedding of Thomas Lincoln and Sarah Bush Johnson took place in December, 1819. As the schools in southern Indiana usually kept during the winter months, it would appear that Crawford taught Lincoln during the winter term of 1820-1821.

There is some evidence to support the statement that Crawford's school met in his own cabin home and that not more than ten or twelve children were enrolled. The location of the Crawford home has not been established.

We know from examples of Crawford's handwriting that he was a good scribe but aside from that we are able to learn little of his scholastic training except the statement which Lincoln made about early school teachers in general.

There are four incidents associated with the Crawford school which tradition has kept alive. One or two of them lack some of the dramatic elements,

usually built up, when we realize that Lincoln was not more than twelve years old at this time. They are worth repeating, however, as they give an insight into the conduct of the early school.

Crawford evidently tried to teach his pupils etiquette, or "manners" as it was then called, and he pursued this course by practical demonstrations. He would ask one of the pupils to withdraw from the schoolroom and then re-enter, being received at the door by one of the other scholars who escorted him from bench to bench, introducing him to each one present.

Much has been made of Lincoln's appearance at this time and a jocular rather than serious aspect has been given this valuable backwoods training.

Another widely circulated story of an incident in the Crawford school is the famous spelling match, in which Lincoln helped one of his classmates to spell the word "defied." Katy Roby was asked to spell this word and continued as far as "d-e-f" when she paused, not knowing whether to use a "y" or an "i." Looking over toward Lincoln she saw him point his finger at his eye and immediately took the hint, spelling the word correctly.

It was at the Crawford school, also, where the teacher observed that one of a pair of antlers, which had been fixed to the wall, was broken off. Upon his inquiry as to who was responsible for this, Lincoln immediately rose and explained that he did not intentionally break it but he thought it would hold his weight and found out that it wouldn't. The teacher is said to have commended him for his honesty.

Possibly the greatest contribution which Andrew Crawford made to Abraham Lincoln was the placing in his hands of "Weems' Life of Washington."

Practically all of the early biographers are in agreement that this book belonged to Lincoln's school teacher, Andrew Crawford.

This fact is supported by Lincoln's own testimony made in Trenton when he said:

"Away back in my childhood, the earliest days of my being able to read, I got hold of a small book, . . . Weems' Life of Washington."

The issue of Lincoln Lore for next week will discuss this early biography and its influence over Abraham Lincoln.

Note: The editor of Lincoln Lore would be pleased to have any information as to what became of Andrew Crawford after he taught the Lincoln school in Spencer County in the year 1821 or thereabouts.