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AZEL W. DORSEY, LINCOLN PEDAGOGUE

The last name of one of Lincoln's school teachers was Hazel, and the first name of his last instructor was Azel. The similarity of names has caused some confusion in identifying these two characters.

Azel Walters Dorsey was the only school teacher of Lincoln, as far as we can learn, who lived contemporaneously with him in the Illinois country. When Lincoln prepared his autobiographical sketch for Scripps and named his five school teachers successively, he named Dorsey last. His only personal reference in this sketch about any one of the teachers was about the latter, of whom he said:

"The family of Mr. Dorsey now resides in Schuyler County, Illinois."

The first information we learn about Dorsey, in the court records, is the fact that he married Eleanor Spriggs in Nelson County, Kentucky, on January 4, 1807. Three days later he and his brother Greenberry Dorsey went on a note, payable to Abraham Vanmatre, for the sum of \$225. We would infer that coming so close to the date of the wedding it had something to do with the matrimonial venture. Whatever the money was used for it is evident that the Dorseys could not meet the payment when it came due on the following December, and it was in May of the next year before any payments were made.

The year Abraham Lincoln was born Azel Dorsey and Greenbury Dorsey his brother, were farming a piece of ground in Hardin County, Kentucky, close by the Mill Creek farm purchased by Thomas Lincoln. Dorsey must have been well acquainted with Lincoln's father and his aunt Mary Lincoln Brumfield. The Brumfields were close neighbors.

In this same year 1809 Azel Dorsey, George Burkheart, and Greenberry Dorsey had rented some land on Clear Creek from Michael Reuch. The fate of the venture is best told in answer to the bill of the suit which Reuch brought to recover damages.

"They (Dorsey, Burkheart, and Dorsey) did cultivate the ground in a farmer-like-manner under the term leased . . . they did pay the plaintiff 1/2 part of the corn raised on the said farm, stacked the hay in three or six

stacks and gave the plaintiff one-third thereof . . . on that day there was a great tremendous flood and freshet in Clear Creek, running through the leased premises, which swept and carried off from the said premises, all the rails and fencing thereon, by means of which irresistible act of nature or God the defendants were disabled from leaving the farm in the repair required by the covenant."

Apparently the Dorsey's matrimonial seas were rather rough those first two years as far as financial matters were concerned.

By the year 1813, however, the tax lists show that Dorsey owned 100 acres of land and three horses. The same year he was appointed a commissioner of the revenue tax. This was a responsible office and kept Dorsey busy several weeks with a fair remuneration. His brother, Greenberry, owned slaves but there is no record to show how Azel stood on this question which was a live subject of debate in pioneer Kentucky.

Dorsey arrived in the Indiana country as early as May 13, 1816, when he served as clerk of an election at the home of William Berry in Ohio Township, Warrick County. In the year 1818 he was serving as Treasurer and Coroner in the territory that is now Spencer County, Indiana.

Such responsible positions as these indicate that Dorsey was a leader in the affairs of the community.

His popularity may have been responsible for his decision to enter the mercantile business as set forth in this agreement filed in Spencer County Court House:

Rockport, March 10, 1819.

"A covenant and particular bond between A. W. Dorsey and M. B. Snyder. We do agree to and have this day entered into co-partnership in the mercantile business for the term of 5 years trading under the firm of Dorsey and Snyder . . ."

"As early as 1820 Dorsey began to purchase lots in Rockport, near where he then lived, but by March seventh of the following year he had moved to an adjacent county, Dubois. The census for 1820 shows him to be a resident of Dubois county, at that time. He and his wife are both listed as between 26 and 45 years of age. Three sons under ten years of age and one boy between 10 and 16 are also listed. By May 10, 1823, the family had returned to Spencer County but continued to sell some of their Rockport land holdings. It was in June, 1824, when it appears that their last Rockport real estate was sold. What became of the partnership venture with Snyder in the mercantile business is not known.

It seems most likely that it was during the early months of 1826 that Lincoln attended Dorsey's school as

on March 1, of that year Lincoln copied into his manuscript book of examples several items under these headings: 1st, "A definition of discount," second, "Rules for its computation," third, "Proofs and various examples."

Dorsey's qualifications to teach are evident as he was able to instruct James Swaney, a former teacher of Lincoln. In fact, it may be accepted without doubt that Dorsey was by far the best equipped tutor who had instructed Lincoln, and fortunately came in contact with the boy at a time when some advanced training in mathematics would be helpful to him.

The variety of the positions that Dorsey held tends to prove that his education, for that day at least, was not of the single track style. The student of arithmetic then was considered to have reached the peak of intellectual achievement.

At the time Lincoln became the pupil of Dorsey the latter was about forty-two years of age as he was born November 5, 1784.

Dorsey migrated to the Illinois country two years before the Lincolns' left Indiana and taught a term of school there in the fall and winter of 1828-29.

The late J. B. Oakleaf contributed an article to the Journal of the Illinois Historical Society in which he tells of Dorsey's residence in Schuyler County, Illinois, and was successful in locating the grave of Dorsey. Mr. Oakleaf was convinced that Dorsey was in the war of 1812 and received his land grant in Schuyler county in recognition of that service. In 1840 Dorsey entered two tracts of land in the county.

Mr. Oakleaf was successful in discovering the grave of Dorsey and on the tomb stone the date of his death was clearly inscribed: September 13, 1858. This discovery would not allow the continuance of the tradition which claims that Dorsey was living at the time of Lincoln's election to the presidency. It does not invalidate the testimony of Dorsey that at the time he taught Lincoln, his pupil, who was then marked for the eagerness and diligence with which he pursued his studies, came to the log cabin school house arrayed in buck skin clothes, a racoon-skin cap, and provided with an old arithmetic which had been found for him to begin his investigations into the "higher branches."

One of Dorsey's Illinois school pupils, the Reverend Chauncey Hobart, in his book "Recollections of My Life. Fifty Years of Itinerary in the Northwest," writes that Mr. Dorsey remembered young Lincoln kindly, spoke of him frequently and said:

"Abraham Lincoln was one of the noblest boys I ever knew and is certain to become noted if he lives."

Mr. Briggs