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Dr. Louis A. Warren - - - Editor

REVEREND DAVID ELKIN

The biographical sketches of Lincoln's school teachers, which have appeared at intervals in recent numbers of Lincoln Lore, have been so well received, that a similar series presenting some of the pioneer preachers who influenced Lincoln is anticipated.

The preacher most often associated with Abraham Lincoln's younger years is Rev. David Elkin. He was the minister of the church to which the parents of Abraham Lincoln belonged in Kentucky and also preached the funeral sermon of Nancy Hanks Lincoln in Spencer County, Indiana.

As early as 1792 the names of Nathaniel and Jesse Elkin are entered in the commissioner's books of Green County, Kentucky. In 1800, the name of David Elkin appears on record as a white male over twenty-one years of age. From then until 1842 it occurs with regularity on the books that are available. It was in Green County, adjacent to La Rue County, where the Kentucky home of the Lincoln's was located, that David Elkin grew up.

He was raised in the Good Hope Church in Green County later becoming pastor of the congregation. He served them until 1811 when he was succeeded by John Chandler.

On the fourth Saturday in April, 1812, the following order appears in the record book of the South Fork Baptist Church. "Brother Jesse Friend appointed to go and see brother Elkin and request him to come and see us." There is evidence in the records that Elkin was preaching at this church in Hardin County during March, 1813. Jesse Friend, the messenger to consult Elkins was the husband of Mary or Polly Hanks said to have been an aunt of Lincoln's mother.

Spencer says that in 1814 Elkin performed wedding services in Hardin County, and also preached the introductory sermon for the Russell Creek Association. This writer also gives us a very good picture of him:

"He was a man of extraordinary natural intellect, but was uncultivated, being barely able to read. He was extremely poor as to this world's goods; and what was worse he was very indolent and slovenly in his dress. Yet it pleased the Lord to use him to good account in the early days of his ministry. . . . His reputation was somewhat sullied in his latter years, perhaps from too free use of strong drink."

The editor of Lincoln Lore at one time interviewed Fields Elkin, a grandson of David Elkin, who said:

"His father had related to him how that when Grandfather Elkin first went to preaching he did not know but one letter in the alphabet, the letter O, and he knew that because it was round. In his old age, however, he could read the Bible through by heart."

There are several instances in the record books of Green County which bear out the statement of the grandson that the old preacher could not write. On numerous occasions he made his mark where his signature should have appeared.

Fields Elkin also gives us the assurance that it was his grandfather who preached Nancy Lincoln's funeral service; together with the few details which he remembers concerning his grandfather's trip to Indiana.

"Grandfather Elkin went to visit his two sons, Hodgen and Warren, who had moved to Indiana. On the way he stopped at Thomas Lincoln's, whom he had known when Thomas lived in Kentucky. While there he preached the funeral service of Nancy Hanks. He then went on and spent some time with his relatives before returning."

Until lately I have been sceptical, more or less, of the tradition which says that Abraham Lincoln as a nine year old boy wrote a letter to David Elkin asking him to come and preach his mother's funeral. After corresponding with some of the descendants of Elkin, I have been led to think that possibly such a letter was written. One aged member of the family claims to have seen the letter:

That the memorial service did not take place for several weeks after the interment of the body, was not uncommon in the pioneer country where a minister could not be secured at the time of the burial. We have no detailed account of the eulogy which Elkin delivered. His close contact with the family for several years in the Kentucky home where he had frequently visited, would allow him to pay a worthy tribute to this pioneer

mother. One who was present at the service has described it as follows:

"As the appointed day approached notice was given the entire neighborhood. On a bright sabbath morning the settlers of the neighborhood gathered in. Some came in carts of the rudest construction, their wheels consisting of huge holes of forest trees and the product of axe and auger; some came on horseback, two or three upon a horse, others came in wagons drawn by oxen, and still others came on foot. Taking his stand at the foot of the grave Parson Elkin lifted his voice in prayer and sacred song and then preached a sermon. He spoke of the precious Christian woman who had gone with the warm praise which she had deserved, and held her up as an example of true womanhood."

There is some confusion as to the whereabouts of David Elkin's grave. The residents at Mitchell, Indiana, claim it is located in an abandoned cemetery three miles from the city. A marker bearing the inscription: "David Elkins, 2nd South Carolina Militia, War of 1812," is to be found there.

This Elkins is said to have enlisted for the war of 1812 from Richland District, North Carolina and was discharged March 9, 1815.

The name of David Elkin, the Kentucky preacher, appears in the Kentucky records so many times during the interval between 1812 and 1815 that he cannot be associated with the Indiana personage by the name of Elkins. While the matter of using a final "s" in the spelling of a name is of no vital importance, there does seem to be some consistency in the spelling of Elkin among the Kentucky branch of the family.

As late as 1842 the names of David Elkin, Sr. and David Elkin, Jr. appear on the tax list of Green County, Kentucky. David Jr. was the father of Fields Elkin who is positive that his grandfather, Rev. David Elkin, Sr., died near Mt. Sherman, LaRue County, Kentucky, and is buried near his own father David Elkin, Sr. I have visited the Old Elkin Grave yard but no stones mark the graves of these pioneers.