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HOOSIER PREACHERS LINCOLN HEARD

When the Lincoln family arrived at their new home in Southern Indiana they found a religious organization had already been established in the community. On June 8, 1816, Pigeon Church was constituted with thirteen members. Thomas Downs and Samuel Bristow were chosen moderator and clerk respectively. The preachers who influenced Abraham Lincoln most during the formative years which followed until he was twenty-one years of age were the ministers of this organization.

Thomas Downs

While the Pigeon Church was being established it is evident that Thomas Downs assisted the newly organized group to get under way. He was a brother of William Downs who had been the Lincoln's preacher in Kentucky and undoubtedly was known to Thomas and Nancy Lincoln. He served churches on both sides of the Ohio river, as the year following the establishment of the Pigeon Church his name appears on the marriage register of Ohio County court in Kentucky as having performed wedding ceremonies in that county, and also on the record book of Daviess county court as having married on March 21, 1817, John H. Priest and Isabell Grisby.

On October 19, 1821, Thomas Downs was at Pigeon church to assist in the organization of the Little Pigeon Association of United Baptists. Ten churches were represented at this meeting.

It was evidently about this time that Thomas Downs gave more of his time to the Kentucky churches under his care as his name appears frequently on the marriage registers of the counties on the Kentucky side of the Ohio.

Samuel Bristow

It appears that the first regular preacher in Pigeon church was Samuel Bristow. He and his wife, Lavina, were among the thirteen charter members of the church. The United States census for 1821 shows him to have been a resident of Spencer county, Indiana, at that time with a family consisting of his wife, four boys and three girls. Both he and his wife were then under 45 years of age.

It is not likely that he had any ministerial training but took up preaching as an elder in the church. In the spring of 1821 he performed three marriage ceremonies in Spencer county, one of them in the home of Thomas Lincoln, on June 14, when Dennis F. Hanks was united in marriage to Elizabeth Johnston, a step-sister of Abraham Lincoln.

John Richardson

On November 13, 1819, John Richardson was appointed as one of a committee of ten to choose a site for a church building; in March, 1821, he was still serving on the building committee. At the meeting of the Perry County Baptist Association held on October 19 of that year he was appointed as an alternate to preach at the association meeting in July, 1822. Evidently he was another minister who grew up in the Pigeon church.

In 1820 his family consisted of his wife and six children. Both Mr. and Mrs. Richardson were under 45 years of age at this time. In the year 1824 there seems to have been some trouble in the Richardson family as Thomas Lincoln and two other members of the church were appointed to go to "Sister Nancy Richardson and her late husband and inquire of them the cause of their separation."

Young Lamar

Possibly the best known preacher who was associated with the Pigeon Church was Young Lamar. As early as 1819 his name appears on the record book of the church and it was at his home in October, 1821, where the Little Pigeon Association of Baptist churches was first planned. During the entire period of the Lincoln's residence in Indiana he was living a few miles from them on land he had entered as early as February 17, 1817, near which the town of Lamar is now situated.

When the Lincoln's first met Lamar he was at least forty-five years old and had three children. It is apparent from his leadership in the religious activities of the country that he was the outstanding minister in that section for many years, and was most often chosen to preach the sermon at the meetings of the Baptist Association.

When Abraham Lincoln's step-sister Matilda Johnston was married to Squire Hall on September 14, 1826, Young Lamar was called to the Lincoln cabin to perform the ceremony.

Charles Harper

Little seems to be known about the minister, Charles Harper, who married Sarah Lincoln, sister of Abraham, to Aaron Grigsby, August 2, 1826. As early as 1821 he signed a certificate as "minister of the gospel" and possibly he was preaching at Pigeon Church at the time Sarah Lincoln was married.

Adam Shoemaker

Tradition claims that the preacher at Pigeon Church who was the strongest advocate of anti-slavery principles was Adam Shoemaker.

Delegates from the Little Pigeon association visiting the Salem Baptist Association in 1828 concurred in the resolution that "it is inconsistent to have any fellowship with those who avow the principle of slavery."

Shoemaker's name appears in the county records as early as 1818 and he was still preaching in Spencer County as late as 1825.

Charles Polk

One of the preachers who always attended the association meetings at Pigeon Church during the residence of the Lincolns in Indiana was Rev. Charles Polk. He was the minister at Old Gilend Church, near Tobinsport, over a long period of years. Polk bought a Bible of Martin Wycliff at Bardstown, Kentucky, in 1814 for which he paid \$9.00. On the inside cover leaf of this old book there is a note signed by William Downs at the time he was preaching at Little Mount Church in Kentucky, where the Lincolns attended. It is as follows: "I will by the first of April, 1814, take this Bible at \$9.00 if I can pay the cash at that time. I will at all events pay 4 1/2 then and 4 1/2 in a few weeks. Let no man have it. I cannot take it now. William Downs."

Jeremiah Cash

The Little Pigeon Baptist association often met at Pigeon church for its association meeting. This gave Lincoln an opportunity to hear practically all of the neighboring preachers. One of the men who ministered to a nearby church was Jeremiah Cash. He was a son of Warren Cash, the famous Baptist preacher of Kentucky. His mother Susannah Cash is said to have been the first convert to religion under the preaching of a Kentucky minister. That the parents of Jeremiah were well known to Thomas and Nancy Lincoln can not be doubted as he was often in their community in Kentucky.

At one of the sessions of the Baptist Association at Pigeon Church, Jeremiah Cash became greatly offended and withdrew from the session. He gave his reason for so doing as follows:

"On Friday after the session adjourned one of their body stated in conversation with some persons that he believed that the doctrine of Predestination came from Hell and would go there and all who preached it." This incident took place on "the Friday before the first Lord's day in September in 1829." Jeremiah Cash at that time was the pastor of Union Church.

The names of more than twenty-five other ministers appear on the marriage register of Spencer County and the two other counties close to the Lincoln home, so that it does not appear that there was any lack of preaching in southern Indiana while Lincoln was growing up.