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Dr. Louis A. Warren - - - Editor

THE NATIVITY

Each year the anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth invites the nation to pause and review again the achievements of its most illustrious son. While the events in his career which contributed to his greatness will be rehearsed in every school house in the land many will meditate upon his humble origin and the hardships of pioneer folk.

It is doubtful if any phase of Lincoln history has been more grossly misrepresented than the surroundings which welcomed the infant into the world. In fact it has been the general opinion of the reading public, based on the literature which has come into its hands, that the origin of Lincoln was comparable to the nativity scene at Bethlehem.

Careful investigations made, in recent years, throw a much different light on the actual conditions existing in the cabin home of the Lincolns on February 12, 1809. The wretched poverty of the Lincoln family has existed only in the minds of the authors who have vied with each other in giving to Lincoln a very unlovely introduction into the world.

It is true that his parents were poor but no worse off than their neighbors. It is true that Lincoln was born in a log cabin, but so were all the children of the pioneers. It is true that his parents were unschooled, but that was the condition of the great majority of their contemporaries who had grown up in a country that offered few educational privileges.

If we are to think of the nativity of Abraham Lincoln in its true perspective, we must place ourselves in the atmosphere of that day and tune and appraise his surroundings in the light of pioneer days.

Two parallel columns are submitted here which visualize the traditional and the documentary nativity of Abraham Lincoln.

Traditional Citations

"The whole house squalid, cheerless, and utterly void of elevating inspiration."

"Here was the home and here were the occupants, all humble, all miserably poor."

"It is well nigh impossible to exaggerate the adverse conditions which surrounded him."

"The boy spent the most susceptible years of his life under no discipline, but that of degrading poverty."

"Reared in gripping, grinding, pinching penury and pallid poverty, amid the most squalid destitution possible to conceive."

"Lincoln was born in a degradation very far below respectable poverty in the state of Kentucky and lived in that poverty all his life."

"In the midst of the most unpromising circumstances that ever witnessed the advent of a boy into the world, Abraham Lincoln was born on the twelfth of February 1809."

"The domestic surroundings under which the babe came into life were wretched in the extreme... Rough, coarse, low, ignorant and poverty stricken surroundings were about the child."

"But Lincoln rose from a lower depth than any of them, from a stagnant putrid pool; like the gas which set on fire by its own energy and self-cumbustible nature rises in jets blazing clear and bright."

"In childhood and youth his place of abode a squalid camp in a howling wilderness, his meal an ashen crust, his bed a pile of leaves, his nominal guardian a shiftless and worthless vagabond."

"Born not only in poverty, but surrounded by want and suffering; favored in nothing; wanting in everything which makes up the joys of life... It was literal truth that 'he had not where to lay his head'."

"It was miserable, desolate, cold (time of Lincoln's nativity)... Not a piece of wood in the cabin, nothing with which to rekindle the fire... Enlow searched everywhere in the cabin for a morsel of food, but the rough shelves were as bare as the walls..."

"The character of that miserable dwelling—not much more than a hovel—was, however, in keeping with the unkempt, hungry-looking clearing which surrounded it."

Note—Sources have been purposely omitted but can be supplied if needed for verification.

Documentary Citations

On December 12, 1808, Thomas Lincoln paid \$200 cash for the 300 acre farm on which Abraham Lincoln was born just two months later.

The Lincoln cabin was the same size as ninety percent of all the pioneer cabins built at that time.

A few months before the birthday of Abraham Lincoln his father was living in Elizabethtown and paying taxes on a log cabin and two house lots.

Abraham had a little sister two years older than he and she grew up to be an honorable young lady.

Both of Abraham Lincoln's parents were members of the Little Mount Church situated about three miles from their home.

In 1808 the Lincoln home received several additions to its supply of kitchen ware as is evident by the purchases of Thomas Lincoln.

When Abraham Lincoln was born his father owned at least 540 acres of land and possibly another tract of 250 acres and the house lots in Elizabethtown.

Lincoln's father received \$17.60 about the time of Abraham's birth for services performed in Elizabethtown.

In the year 1809 Thomas Lincoln entered two horses for taxes.

One month and three days after the birth of Abraham, Thomas Lincoln served as a jurymen at the county seat.

On November 15, 1808, Thomas Lincoln was in a law suit as plaintiff from which he recovered nearly twenty-five dollars.

In the years previous to Abraham's birth his father bought many items at one of the stores in Elizabethtown, which support the fact that he was a cabinet maker.

The farm on which the Lincolns lived at the time of Abraham's birth had the best spring of water in the whole countryside and the land was superior to that owned by most of Lincoln's neighbors.

Note—Copies of the original documents which support the above assertions may be found in "Lincoln's Parentage and Childhood," by the editor of Lincoln Lore, and published by The Century Company of New York.