

LINCOLN LORE

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REV. JESSE HEAD, PIONEER PREACHER

It seems appropriate that the cabin in which the parents of Lincoln were married and the monument to the preacher who performed the ceremony are to be found not far apart.

Nine years ago the citizens of Harrodsburg, Kentucky, dedicated a memorial tablet to the minister who presided at the nuptials. On June 12, this year, the one hundred twenty-fifth anniversary of the wedding, the same city will formally receive the wedding cabin enshrined in a beautiful memorial edifice.

The wedding ceremony of Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks was performed by the Rev. Jesse Head in Washington County, Kentucky, in a Washington county cabin. The preacher later on moved to Mercer County, and now after a hundred years have elapsed the cabin has followed him.

Jesse Head has emerged from a traditional character whom some biographers claim never existed, to an influential citizen who held many public offices. This brief sketch will not attempt to trace his career after 1806 at which time the important event which associated him with Lincoln history occurred.

Jesse Head and his wife, Jane Ramsey Head came from Maryland to Kentucky about the year 1795, and settled on Road Run in Washington County, not far from where the Widow Lincoln and her orphan children were living. In 1797 he entered fifty acres of land and one horse for taxation.

The early occupation of Jesse Head seems to be well established. On December 5, 1797, he took into his home David Rodman, an orphan who was bound out to him "to learn the art of a cabinet maker." Two years later two orphan children, William Edward Head, Jr., and Thomas Edward Head, chose Jesse as their guardian, and they, too, were bound out to him "to learn the art of the cabinet maker." One wonders if Thomas Lincoln, youngest son of the Widow Lincoln, living near by, did not learn some of the elements of his own trade from Jesse Head.

In February, 1798, Jesse Head became a Justice of the Peace for Washington County. He was then but thirty years of age. Mordecai Lincoln,

brother of Thomas, was plaintiff in one of the first cases tried by the new magistrate and he decided against the plaintiff. Lincoln appealed the case to the county court but the judgment of the magistrate was sustained.

About this time Jesse Head moved to Springfield, the county seat of Washington County, and began to take a more active part in the county affairs.

JESSE HEAD CERTIFICATE

Washington County

I do hereby certify that the following is a true list of marriages solemnized by me, the subscriber from the 28th of April, 1806, until the date thereof.

- June 26 1806 joined together in the Holy Estate of Matrimony agreeable to the rules of the M. E. C.:
- Morris Berry and Peggy Simms.
Nov. 27th 1806 David Mize & Hanah Xter.
March 5 1807 Charles Ridge & Anna Davis.
March 24 1807 John Head & Sally Clark.
March 27th Benjamin Clark & Dolly Head.
Jany. 14th Edward Pyle & Rosanah McMahon.
Deer 22 1806 Silas Chamberlin & Betsey West.
June 17th 1806 John Springer & Elizabeth Ingram.
June 12 1806 Thomas Lincoln & Nancy Hanks.

On May 2, 1798, Jesse Head was appointed to supervise the erection of "stocks, pillory, and a whipping post upon the public square in Springfield." Later on he was appointed a commissioner to see that posts and rails were erected around the well and public spring of the town.

By 1802, Jesse Head was a trustee of the town of Springfield, and the following year succeeded the renowned Felix Grady as "President of the Board of Trustees of Springfield."

Aside from service as a Justice of the Peace and President of the Board of Trustees of the town of Springfield, he was also the local postmaster. This added responsibility caused an indictment to be brought against him in 1803 for "holding two offices" at the same time.

Aside from the public service rendered by Head and his plying his trade as a cabinet member he was also a Methodist preacher. Mr. L. S. Pence, of Lebanon, discovered an old book in which the name of Jesse Head appears under the date of May 25, 1798, as one having "a license to preach according

to the rules of the sect to which he belongs."

Another record showing his communion with the Methodist society is dated October 3, 1805, at which time he was ordained a deacon by Bishop Francis Asbury. Head was referred to in this report as a "local preacher."

As early as 1803 the following order was issued by the Washington County Court:

"On the motion of Jesse Head, a minister of the Gospel of the Methodist Church who made oath, a testimonial is granted him to solemnize the rites of marriage on his giving bond in three days in the clerk's office with Edward Clarkson and William H. Hays, his secretaries."

Two years later on July 1, 1805, in the same court house, a strange coincidence happened when Jesse Head became security for Peter Cartright, President Lincoln's opponent in the congressional election of 1856, who had applied for a license to "solemnize the rites of marriage."

I was very anxious to find some evidence that Jesse Head was present in Washington County about the same time in June in the year 1806 that the parents of Lincoln were married and in a record book of the Washington County circuit court, I found much more than I anticipated.

On June 10, 1806, just two days before the wedding "Jesse Head, a Justice of the Peace of the said (Washington) County," signed an order in the suit of Williams vs. Meagan.

The day before June 9, Richard Berry, the guardian of Nancy Hanks, appeared on a jury to try the case of the Commonwealth vs. Edward, Sarah, and Richard Dorsey. On the day before the wedding, June 11, there were two cases in court in which Mordecai Lincoln, brother of Thomas Lincoln was the defendant.

Some years ago I heard a tradition that the Court which was in session in Springfield at the time of the Thomas Lincoln-Nancy Hanks wedding of June 12, was dismissed and many of the lawyers attended the affair. This tradition seems to be confirmed by the circuit court record book which shows that the court did not convene on Thursday, July 12, but was in session both the day before and the day after the wedding. The Head, Lincoln, and Berry families, all had business in the court and the wedding would prevent their attendance. It is reasonable to believe that the wedding of Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks was of sufficient importance to so deplete the court that the session of the body was postponed.

It is very likely that the Lincoln-Hanks wedding scene on July 12, 1806, with its distinguished guests present, has not been greatly exaggerated by those who claim to have been in attendance.