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THE EVERLASTING SPRINGS OF THE LINCOLNS

The most valuable prizes for which primitive man fought in the early struggle for survival, were the "Springs of Water." Near these natural fountains, so necessary for the well-being of the family, they built their first camps. Down through the centuries the frontiersman, when seeking a place for his wilderness home, has been influenced by the availability of good water. It is evident in the development of the western country that arid claims with excellent springs were usually chosen in preference to the more fertile acres with a limited water supply. Centers of population soon grew up around many of these spring sites.

The everlasting springs have become the natural memorials which mark the abiding places of our ancestors. Imposing shrines have been erected to designate sites of historic importance, but often nature has established more enduring monuments to mark the spots where illustrious men have lived and died. The several homes of the Lincolns in Kentucky are marked by everlasting springs and regardless of man's efforts to honor the Emancipator and his people, nature has taken care that the sites of their cabin homes shall not be forgotten.

An old chinquapin tree standing in the very northeast corner of Jefferson County, Kentucky, seeks its nourishment from the spring that furnished water for the first Lincoln cabin in the great Wilderness. The constant cultivation of the field in which this spring is located has caused the walls, which formerly enclosed it, to collapse, but a small cairn just above the place where the water oozes out of the earth, has been erected by visitors from the stones that once composed the small spring house. It was close by this spring that Abraham Lincoln, the pioneer grandfather of President Lincoln, was killed by the Indians in the month of May, 1786.

The widow Lincoln and her five orphan children soon moved to what is now Washington County, Kentucky. Here in the Beech Fork community all five of her children were married. The last of the five wedding ceremonies to be celebrated was the marriage of the youngest son, Thomas Lincoln, to

Nancy Hanks, who was living in the home of her cousin and guardian, Richard Berry, where the wedding took place. This cabin stood by a generous flow of water which for many years has been known as the Lincoln Spring. The original cabin has been moved away, but nature's memorial still remains. Here other youths of the community may pledge their love and plight their faith with cups of cool spring water.

Within two and a half years after the wedding in the Berry cabin, Thomas Lincoln purchased for "two hundred dollars, cash in hand paid," the three hundred acre farm in what is now Larue County, Kentucky. Undoubtedly the famous spring, close by the beginning corner of the farm survey, influenced Lincoln in the purchase of the property. In the deed which designates the boundaries of the farm at the time the Lincolns lived there, is the following clause "a certain parcel or tract of land on the waters of the South Fork of Nolin, containing three hundred acres, beginning near or at the spring called the Sinking Spring."

It is difficult to find a more picturesque spring than this one, near which Abraham Lincoln was born on February 12, 1809. After centuries of continual toil it has made its own house in a lime stone cave, seven feet high, seven feet wide, and fifteen feet long. It is overhung with the branches of a huge tree and its banks are covered with wild vines. Except for the retaining wall built just outside the cave, and the approach down a flight of stone steps, it is very much like it must have been in the days of Lincoln's infancy.

In pioneer times a much travelled trail passed by the convenient watering place and the spring became known for miles around. It was first called Sinking Spring, later Cave Spring and Rock Spring, and now Lincoln Spring.

On the back wall of this natural limestone spring house we have what may be the first attempt to memorialize Lincoln with hammer and chisel. Shortly after Lincoln's election, a person by the name of Samuel Castene, who lived in New York, stopped at the home of the Creals, then in possession of the old Lincoln Spring. Mr. Castene borrowed from Judge Creal, a boy of eight years, a hammer and chisel with which he cut in the rock on the side of the cave above the spring his initials S. C. He gave the boy a piece of money for the use of the hammer and chisel, which fact has inscribed on Judge Creal's memory, throughout his life, the name of Samuel Castene, although he never saw nor heard from him since that time. In 1865 some Northern soldiers returning from the war, stopped at the

spring and noticed the large letters carved in the wall; one of them remarked that S. C. stood for Southern Confederacy. We may draw the conclusion that before the war closed, the old spring had already become the natural monument of the birthplace of Abraham Lincoln. The letters S. C. deeply cut in the rock can be seen today on the wall of the cave.

It is doubtful if nature ever marked a man's birthplace with a more enduring monument than the Rock Spring. Long after the building on the hill shall have crumbled with the coming centuries, the stream of cold water from the never failing spring will continue to force its way through the crevice in the eternal rock which marks the nativity scene of the "Man for the Ages."

One becomes so much interested in the source of the spring and the cavity made by the continual dropping of the water for many centuries, that some of the other features of the cave are overlooked.

On the topmost shelf of the cave, a pair of pewees usually makes its nest each summer. Although the increasing number of guests who annually visit the spring make it difficult for them to carry out their feeding program for the fledglings, they continue to build their nest in the old cave where generations of their parents have built before them. One is bound to recall the incident related by the Kentucky friend of Lincoln, how in later years he, a man grown, spent on one occasion at least, considerable time in an effort to place some young birds back in a nest from which they had fallen.

There are not so many springs in the Indiana country which became the home of the Lincolns in 1816, and much has been said about the difficulty with which Thomas Lincoln found sufficient water for his family to drink. The scarcity of drinking water on the Lincoln farm has been greatly exaggerated. Within five hundred feet of the Lincoln cabin site there are three good wells which the present owners of the property say seldom if ever go dry. Within this same radius is a spring which old citizens remember had a considerable flow in the early days. An experienced frontiersman like Thomas Lincoln would not make the mistake of purchasing a tract of land without drinking water close by the site where he intended to build his cabin. Since the building of the railroad station, nearby, the old spring has been walled in and a concrete top placed over it.

These natural memorials in Kentucky and Indiana, which mark the home sites of the Lincolns, are after all the best markers for the cabin sites as no pioneer lived very far away from an everlasting spring.