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THE HOOSIER HOME OF THOMAS LINCOLN

On October 20, 1864, Abraham Lincoln issued an announcement which has been called the first annual Thanksgiving Proclamation. The last Thursday in November was chosen as an appropriate time for the festivities and they have occurred with regularity each year on the established day.

Long before Lincoln issued this famous proclamation it had been the custom of the Pilgrim fathers and their descendants to set aside a day during the harvest period for a festival. It is very likely that the pioneers in the western country had some feast days when it was customary for the scattered members of a family to return to the old cabin home. There is no institution in Indiana today which functions year in and year out with such increasing popularity as the Family Reunion.

The home life of Abraham Lincoln during his early years has been so grossly misrepresented that it may be difficult to think in the terms of a festival in the Hoosier cabin home of Thomas Lincoln, yet Abraham Lincoln on several occasions referred to his early years as the happiest days of his life. If one year could be chosen during Abraham's youth when a family reunion in the Lincoln cabin would approach a Thanksgiving festival, it would be the year 1826. During the summer and early fall of this year the young people in the home who had played together for seven years became scattered and the parents left somewhat alone.

Thomas Lincoln, the head of the house, was fifty years old at this time and the former Widow Johnston, his second wife, was thirty-eight. While no children had been born to this union, both husband and wife had been blessed with children by former marriages. Thomas Lincoln had two children, Sarah and Abraham, and Sarah Johnston Lincoln was the mother of two daughters, Elizabeth and Matilda, and a son, John. The

Lincoln children and the Johnston children were about the same ages so that they became very congenial playmates.

Two weddings had occurred in the cabin home of Thomas Lincoln, in 1826. Sarah Lincoln, the only sister of Abraham, had married Aaron Grigsby, and Matilda Johnston, a sister of John, had married Squire Hall. The Grigsby-Lincoln wedding had taken place on August 2, and the young people had gone to keeping house about five miles to the south of the Lincolns. The wedding of Squire Hall and Matilda had occurred on the fourteenth of September. Hall was a relative of Abraham Lincoln's own mother, a son of Levi and Nancy Hanks Hall, and a half brother of Dennis Hanks.

When Abraham Lincoln's sister, Sarah, the one who had mothered him after his own mother's death, left the old cabin home there would be all the more incentive for Abraham to find some steady employment which would take him away, in fact, it was about this time that he spent several months at Anderson Creek as a ferryman. Possibly the only one of the children who was staying with Thomas Lincoln and his wife at this time was John Johnston, son of Mrs. Lincoln.

Everything would seem to be set for a real family reunion about the time the corn was gathered in 1826. Of course, the guests of honor on this occasion would be the two new sons-in-law, Aaron Grigsby and Squire Hall; Abraham, who would be back from Anderson Creek, and his playmate, John D. Johnston, would see to it that Grigsby and Hall had a proper welcome into the family circle.

Another family would be present, which would furnish the other element, grandchildren, necessary for any successful family reunion. Elizabeth Johnston, who had married Dennis Hanks, already mentioned, had at least two and possibly three children at this time, so grandfather and grandmother Lincoln would be obliged to have a turkey for the children's sake.

One of the children had this to say in after years about her grandfather Thomas Lincoln, "He made a good living, and I reckon he would have got something ahead if he hadn't been so generous. He had the old Virginia notion of hospitality—liked to see people sit up to the table and eat heartily." Evidently she received the same thrill on going to grandfather's as children do today.

If it is not assuming too much that the Lincoln family had a reunion about this time, it was probably remembered by Abraham Lincoln as one of the happy occasions of his boyhood. A little over a year after this a great sorrow was to come into his life, in the death of his sister, and it is difficult to visualize another family reunion in the Lincoln home after that which would mean much to Abraham Lincoln. With the mother and sister both gone, the Lincoln family would lose very much of the personal contact which had bound Abe to it.

After returning from a visit to the old Indiana home in the late fall of 1844, he wrote some verses which may have been inspired by such family reunions as were possible in the Lincoln home in 1826. The poem appears on this page.

The Lincolns' Hoosier Home

My childhood's home I see again,
And sadden with the view;
And still, as memory crowds my brain,
There's pleasure in it too.

O Memory! thou midway world
'Twi'x earth and paradise,
Where things decayed and loved ones
lost
In dreamy shadows rise.

And, freed from all that's earthly
vile,
Seem hallowed, pure, and bright,
Like scenes in some enchanted isle
All bathed in liquid light.

As dusky mountains please the eye
When twilight chases day;
As bugle-notes that, passing by,
In distance die away;

As leaving some grand waterfall,
We, lingering, list its roar—
So memory will hallow all
We've known, but know no more.

Near twenty years have passed away
Since here I bid farewell
To woods and fields, and scenes of
play,
And playmates loved so well.

Where many were, but few remain
Of old familiar things;
But seeing them, to mind again
The lost and absent brings.

The friends I left that parting day,
How changed, as time has sped!
Young childhood grown, strong man-
hood gray,
And half of all are dead.

I hear the loved survivors tell
How nought from death could save,
Till every sound appears a knell,
And every spot a grave.

I range the fields with pensive tread,
And pace the hollow rooms,
And feel (companion of the dead)
I'm living in the tombs.