

LINCOLN LORE

No. 168

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

June 27, 1932

LINCOLN LORE

BULLETIN OF
THE LINCOLN
HISTORICAL
RESEARCH
FOUNDATION



ENDOWED BY
THE LINCOLN
NATIONAL LIFE
INSURANCE
COMPANY

Dr. Louis A. Warren - - - Editor

GRANDPARENTS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

"The First American," is a term often used in speaking of Abraham Lincoln as the embodiment of the ideals of this comparatively young country of ours. It is natural that some interest would be shown in learning about the families which contributed more or less to this character, who stands out as a new type in our world civilization, yet few dependable investigations have been made in this field.

The dedication of a heroic bronze statue of Lincoln as a youth by Paul Manship, which will occupy a place on the plaza of The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company building at Fort Wayne, offers the needed incentive and inspiration to discover if possible just what innate tendencies were passed on to this boy by his forebears.

Genealogists have been slow to attack the problem of the Lincoln lineage because they have been told by Lincoln's early biographers that they would find skeletons in the closets. For this same reason those who could claim relationship to the Lincolns have hesitated to make known their family connection.

The unwholesome stories about the family which were first released during the campaign of 1860 and later incorporated in the works of Lamon and Herndon have proven to be nothing more than gossip. Although some recent biographers have featured these early traditions the fact remains that there is no evidence extant supported by public records that prove any irregularities in the lineage of Abraham Lincoln.

Kentucky, the land of pedigrees, where they tell you with each succeeding Derby that "blood will tell" should bestir itself in defending the good name of Lincoln and his forebears. The discovery of the Thomas Lincoln-Nancy Hanks marriage certificate in a Washington County, Kentucky court house should have silenced forever the question of Lincoln's parentage and with equal diligence much light might be thrown on the identity of Lincoln's grandparents.

Although Abraham Lincoln has been dead less than seventy years only one of his four grandparents has been identified positively. We do know the name of his paternal grandfather, Abraham Lincoln, for whom he was

named and his descent from Samuel Lincoln of Hingham, Massachusetts, has been carefully traced.

Of the three other grandparents we know practically nothing. What has been released about them is based upon tradition or hearsay and there is not available a single record which gives one the full name of the paternal grandmother, the maternal grandfather or grandmother.

Grandfather Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln, son of John and Rebecca ([Flowers] Morris) Lincoln, was born in Berks County, Pennsylvania, on May 13, 1744, and died in Jefferson County, Kentucky (then Virginia) in the month of May, 1786, at forty-two years of age.

On June 9, 1770, in Augusta County, Virginia, Abraham Lincoln, then twenty-six years old, secured a license to marry but the papers do not name his prospective bride. He was the father of three sons and two daughters: Mordecai, Josiah, Thomas, Mary and Nancy. His third son, Thomas, father of the president, was probably named for his brother, Thomas.

When he sold his Virginia lands in 1780 the deed was signed by his wife whose first name was Bersheba. When he died in Kentucky in 1786 Bersheba was the name of his widow.

Grandmother Lincoln

We are positive that the first name of Abraham Lincoln's wife in 1780 and the widow he left in 1786 was Bersheba but there is no record which gives her family name. Whether or not she is the woman whom Abraham Lincoln married in 1770 and the mother of all his children is problematical.

The earliest family traditions claim Bersheba was the daughter of Leonard Herring but as Leonard Herring was not married until August, 1761, Bersheba could not have been more than eight years old when Abraham Lincoln was married in 1770. She may have become Lincoln's second wife some time before 1780. A recent publication by Herring Chrisman shifts the parentage of Bersheba to Alexander Herring, father of Leonard, but she is not named in his will nor in the proceedings which followed in the settlement of the estate.

We do not have positive evidence that Thomas Lincoln's own mother's name was Bersheba and only traditional evidence that Bersheba's maiden name was Herring.

Grandfather Hanks

Abraham Lincoln in his autobiographical sketch claims that his mother was from a family by the name of Hanks and that she was born in Virginia. There is no place in this investigation for introducing a maternal grandfather for Abraham Lincoln who does not bear this name, unless documentary evidence establishes that Abraham Lincoln was in error about his mother's people.

Lincoln's autobiographical sketch also states that John Hanks was a first cousin to his (Abraham's) mother. This statement must also be given due consideration as it does allow us to approach the identical family where we are to try and find the paternal grandfather of Abraham Lincoln.

John Hanks' father was William Hanks, son of Joseph Hanks, Sr., so that Nancy Hanks must have been the daughter of one of the children of this Joseph Hanks. We are fortunate in having the will of Joseph Hanks which names all of his eight children living in 1793 when the will was made. They are Thomas, Joshua, William, Charles, Joseph, Elizabeth, Mary and Nancy.

The family history of the three daughters and two of the sons are available but the descendants of Thomas, Joshua and Charles are not known. There is also a tradition in the family that there was another married son, James, who died in Virginia before the migration to Kentucky and at least four years before the making of the will. If it can be proven that there was such a son he is the most likely candidate for the roll of Grandfather Hanks.

Grandmother Hanks

Although there is no record evidence to prove that Nancy Hanks' mother's first name was Lucy there is a well established tradition to this effect. The maiden name of this Lucy Hanks is not known and there are many conflicting traditions about her. The absence of her name among the daughters of Joseph Hanks in a will in which he says all of his children are named, should be sufficient evidence that her connection with this family must have been through one of Joseph Hanks' sons. Lucy married Henry Sparrow in 1790 four years before Joseph Hanks made his will, so it should not be expected he would mention the wife of a deceased son who had married again. This fact also eliminates any one of the living sons in the Joseph Hanks' will as a prospective grandparent. The members of the Sparrow family claim that when Henry Sparrow married Lucy Hanks she was a widow. The editor of *Lincoln Lore* believes that a certain public document confirms this fact.

Tradition says the maiden name of Lucy Hanks was Shipley and the presence of Nancy Hanks as an orphan child in the home of Richard Berry, her guardian, whose wife is said to have been a sister of Lucy, strengthens this evidence. There is no document, however, which establishes that the Lucy Hanks who married Henry Sparrow was a Shipley.

During the next few months the Lincoln Historical Research Foundation will be assisted by the press throughout the country, as well as the large force of field representatives of the company sponsoring the foundation in attempting to discover the missing grandparents of Abraham Lincoln.