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Dr. Louis A. Warren

Editor

THE LINCOLNS CROSSING THE OHIO

The project to build a bridge across the Ohio River between Cannelton and Hawesville, which is now being agitated by the Chambers of Commerce of these two cities, will provide, if successful, the necessary link to join the Lincoln Memorial Highways of Kentucky and Indiana.

A resolution of the Kentucky Highway Committee made on November 12, 1931, specified that the crossing between Hawesville, Kentucky, and Cannelton, Indiana, seemed to be "the most practical point at the present time for a crossing nearest to the actual ferry" on which the Lincolns crossed the Ohio during their migration in 1816.

All of the early biographers in referring to the place where the Lincolns crossed the Ohio in 1816 refer to the ferry they used as Thompson's Ferry or the ferry near the mouth of Anderson River.

Apparently the earliest mention of the crossing of the Ohio was by Barrett, who wrote a campaign biography in June, 1860. Here he mentions a specific place where the Lincolns crossed. The following is an excerpt from his book:

"Arrived at the appointed landing on the banks of the Ohio it only remained to embark the little caravan upon a flatboat, and to cross the stream now swelled to fair proportions by the autumn rains. Finally, after reaching the Indiana side, the adventurers landed at or near the mouth of Anderson's Creek, now the boundary between the counties of Perry and Spencer, about one hundred and forty miles below Louisville, by the river, and sixty above Evansville."

The above excerpt from Barrett's Campaign biography was evidently based on fact and it appears from Barrett's own words in the preface of a later book by him that he had secured part of this information from Abraham Lincoln himself. The following paragraph suggests one of the sources from which he drew his information:

"Before the meeting of the Republican National Convention of 1860 I had undertaken, not of my own motion or at first willingly, to write a campaign biography of its nominee for the Presidency. I was confident that my subject would not be Mr. Seward, but had no presentiment that the choice of the convention would be Abraham Lincoln, whom I had then never met. In my first interview with him, soon after

the adjournment of the convention (of which I was a member), he earnestly and even sadly insisted that there was no adequate material for such a work as was intended, yet he received me very kindly, and showed no unusual reserve in talking of either his earlier or maturer life. As to both periods, he readily gave such facts as my inquiries invited or suggested. . . . My personal intercourse with Lincoln was continued later at Springfield."

Barrett also gave a detailed description of the country adjacent to Lincoln's home and makes special reference to Troy as follows:

"The town on the Ohio River nearest his home was Troy, the capital of Perry County down to the date of its division (1918). This place at the mouth of Anderson Creek, had been settled as early as 1811, and was a place of some consequence both for its river trade and as the county seat."

It was here at the mouth of Anderson River near Troy where Abraham Lincoln himself was employed for about a year, his chief task being to operate a ferry boat across the mouth of the small stream. With the exception of the immediate environment of his own home there is no place in Indiana more closely associated with Abraham Lincoln than the community and environs of Troy.

Whether or not the other biographers followed Barrett's lead, in naming the place of crossing we cannot say. When Thayer wrote "The Pioneer Boy" in 1863, he stated in the preface that "The imagination has done no more than connect facts gathered from authentic sources." Thayer names Thompson's Ferry as the point from which the Lincolns approached their Indiana home, and evidently associates it with the ferry near the mouth of Anderson River.

Later biographies which appear at intervals such as Holland's, Lamon's, Herndon's, Tarbell's and Barton's, all use the Thompson's Ferry landing near the mouth of Anderson River as the point of contact in Indiana.

When the editor of Lincoln Lore wrote his *Lincoln's Parentage and Childhood*, in 1926, he was unable to find any evidence that serious consideration had been given at that time to other points where the Lincolns might have crossed. The following paragraph appears in the closing chapter of his book:

"From Hardinsburg the family would move on to Cloverport, an old river town, and then to Hawesville. This would bring them to a point opposite Cannelton near Tell City. There is a possibility that they may have crossed the Ohio River here. Likely, they did not leave the Kentucky side until they reached the bank of the river opposite Troy at the mouth of Anderson Creek, where there was a ferry in operation. There they would be at the point nearest their Indiana destination."

The above conclusion was not drawn until the author had gone to Breckinridge County and established from the court records at Hardinsburg the fact that a ferry did cross the Ohio River near the mouth of Anderson River. Later while doing research work in the same court house he discovered a record which proves that there was a ferry near this point in 1816, the year the Lincolns migrated, known as "Thompson's Ferry."

The record identifying this ferry was found in the court order book for May, 1816, and mentions the appointment of an overseer of the "road from Thompson's Ferry towards Hardinsburg to what is called the half way ridge between the river and the Yellow Banks Road." This order also proves that a road connected Thompson's Ferry with Hardinsburg.

Still further evidence was discovered about Thompson's Ferry from a record in the order book of the county court for January 16, 1815. It reads as follows:

"It being suggested to the court that the present road leading to the mouth of Yellow Creek would be of greater public utility if it was so changed as to strike the Ohio River at Thompson's Ferry. Ordered that Thomas Blync, William Huff, Hugh Thompson, and Eli Thrasher, or any three of them review proposed change and report to our next court the comparative convenience and inconvenience that would result from such alteration as well to the public as to the individual."

This record indicates that the ferry was operating nearly two years before the Lincolns migrated and it is evident different roads in the county approached this ferry. The naming of Hugh Thompson on this committee might suggest that he was the owner of the ferry.

When Governor Samuel M. Ralston appointed the commission consisting of Joseph M. Cravens and Jesse Weik to gather data about the Lincoln migration from Indiana to Illinois in 1830 they also took upon themselves the task of writing a brief discussion of the Lincolns' arrival in Indiana in 1816. They also state that the Lincolns crossed the Ohio near the mouth of Anderson's River.

As to the identical point where the ferry crossed there has been much speculation but there is no doubt that the objective on the Indiana side was the City of Troy, then the Ohio River metropolis of southern Indiana. Some have placed the Thompson Ferry as far up the river as Tell City, others directly opposite Troy, and still others a short distance below the mouth of Anderson Creek.

It would appear from the evidence available that if a bridge is built across the Ohio between Hawesville and Cannelton it will be in the general proximity of the place where the Lincoln family crossed in 1816.