

LINCOLN LORE

No. 192

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

December 12, 1932

LINCOLN LORE

BULLETIN OF
THE LINCOLN
HISTORICAL
RESEARCH
FOUNDATION



ENDOWED BY
THE LINCOLN
NATIONAL LIFE
INSURANCE
COMPANY

Dr. Louis A. Warren - - - Editor

GRANDFATHER HANKS

The father of Nancy Hanks must have been dead before she was old enough to have any vivid memory of him. It is not likely that she would be able to pass on to her son, Abraham, much of interest about his grandfather Hanks. The fact that Nancy went to live with her Uncle and Aunt Berry after her mother's second marriage would take her out from under her mother's influence and that of the Hanks family, so the name of her father seldom would be mentioned.

During the period between Nancy Hanks' mother's marriage to Henry Sparrow in 1790 and her own marriage to Thomas Lincoln in 1806, there is no dependable evidence that she came into close contact with any members of her father's people, although it is likely that she paid frequent visits to her mother who lived not far away. The tradition that she lived in the home of Thomas and Elizabeth Hanks Sparrow and was brought up by them is without foundation. Her first direct contact with her father's people evidently occurred after she was married in 1806, and there would be little opportunity for cultivating these friendships until after she moved to the farm where Abraham Lincoln was born in 1808.

The Lincoln birthplace farm was not far from the home of Thomas and Elizabeth Hanks Sparrow, with whom Dennis Hanks was living; of Levi and Nancy Hanks Hall; and also of Jesse and Polly Hanks Friend. These three aunts of Nancy Hanks were her neighbors but two years, however, as the Lincolns moved to the Knob Creek farm ten miles away in 1811. Here Nancy Hanks Lincoln lived for five years not far from her Uncle William Hanks.

While Nancy may have talked about her father with her uncles and aunts, Abraham Lincoln, then under eight years of age, would not be especially interested in the conversations.

Inasmuch as Nancy Hanks herself passed away before her son Abraham was ten years of age, it is not likely that she ever said very much to the boy about her own father whom she could not even remember. After Abraham's father married his second wife

the following year, there would be little occasion to discuss the parentage of Thomas Lincoln's first wife in a home where another woman was mothering her children.

The best information which we have on Lincoln's maternal grandfather at present comes from the descendants of pioneer Joseph Hanks. In going through the correspondence which they carried on with Mrs. Hitchcock of Cambridge, Massachusetts, forty years ago, it is evident from these documents that they thought Nancy's father was a son of the pioneer Joseph Hanks.

One of these descendants claims that the father of Nancy was named James. Others support the tradition that James died before the removal of the Hanks family to Kentucky and that his widow came on later with her own people. Every bit of documentary evidence we have been able to gather from court records supports this theory, although we have not been successful as yet in finding the name of Nancy Hanks' father in the public records.

The claim that the mother of Nancy Hanks was Lucy Shipley Hanks, a daughter of Robert Shipley, has been greatly strengthened by recent discoveries and it is not difficult to show that the Hankses and Shipleys were closely associated over a period of many years both in Maryland and in Virginia.

In the records of Christ Church, Queen Caroline Parish, Ann Arundel County, Maryland, there appears the names of Robert Shipley and William Hanks, who were both serving as vestrymen in the same congregation as early as 1736.

Later on in 1758 a Robert Shipley is found in Lunenburg County, Virginia, where there was also living at that time a large colony of Hankses. Later on Bedford County, Virginia, became the center of these Shipley and Hanks families and the tradition that Nancy Hanks was born in James Hanks' cabin on Little Falling River has been in constant circulation for many decades.

Some time ago the editor of Lincoln Lore made a trip into the Little Falling River country in Virginia and interviewed many of the people who now live on the farms once occupied by the Shipleys and Hankses. He found the traditions, locating there the birthplace of Nancy Hanks, the mother of the president, of long standing. In no instance was the regularity of her birth questioned. Much time was also spent in several Virginia courthouses which record the activities of both the Shipley and Hanks families in Virginia over a period of years and substantiate the traditions of their descendants.

Much evidence has been gathered recently from different branches of the Shipley family which would seem to prove beyond a doubt that Lucy Shipley Hanks was the daughter of Robert Shipley. The claims of the descendants of Joseph Hanks that Nancy's father was a son of Joseph has been greatly strengthened by recent findings. In no instance has any public record been discovered that would invalidate these family traditions.

As late as 1793 the pioneer Joseph Hanks of Kentucky had the following five living sons: Thomas, Joshua, William, Charles, and Joseph, Jr. William Hanks married Elizabeth Hall, daughter of Henry Hall, September 12, 1793. He named his first child, born in 1794, James, and the following three sons, Charles, William, and Joseph.

It is evident that the first son was not named for William's own father or his wife's father. It seems to be a fair supposition that this first child was named James in honor of an older brother by that name who, tradition claims, passed away four or five years before. Three sons that followed were named for his living brothers and another was named John. Abraham Lincoln stated that this John Hanks with whom he was closely associated and who furnished the famous rails for the Republican convention was his mother's first cousin.

It seems likely that the mother of Abraham Lincoln might have been named by her father, James Hanks, for his youngest sister, Nancy, who married Levi Hall. Levi and Nancy Hanks Hall named one of their sons James. The Hall children claimed that they were first cousins of the president's mother.

Although there is still much to be done to positively identify the maternal grandfather as James Hanks, a son of Joseph Hanks, and the husband of Lucy Shipley Hanks, yet much progress has been made in weeding out the purely traditional data which can be disproved by duly authorized records.

This is the last of a series of five articles on the four grandparents of Abraham Lincoln, and a review of the data submitted will reveal how little we really know about three of these forebears.

No description of any one of the four grandparents is available, but it is generally conceded that Lincoln's personal appearance can be charged up against the maternal ancestry. There are some very tall members of the Hanks' clan and it is possible that Grandfather Hanks passed on to Abraham Lincoln those physical contributions which have set him apart from his contemporaries.