

LINCOLN LORE

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THE SISTER OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

It is only in recent years that it has become known generally that Abraham Lincoln had a sister. The biographers who first mentioned this fact made two serious mistakes in identifying her: at first they gave her name as Nancy and also claimed that she was younger than Abraham. Lincoln's only sister was born at Elizabethtown, Kentucky, on February 10, 1807, two years and two days before the birth of Abraham. She was named Sarah, evidently in honor of Sarah Shipley Mitchell, her mother's cousin and constant playmate during childhood.

By the time Sarah was five years of age she had lived in three different cabin homes. Her parents moved from Elizabethtown in the late fall of 1808 to the farm where her brother, Abraham, was born. They had lived at this picturesque home by the spring on the Old Cumberland Road but two years when they moved about ten miles north on the same highway to a much more productive farm. It was here at Knob Creek that Sarah spent the rest of her childhood days in Kentucky.

Some traditions about her have been preserved by the descendants of people who as children were her playmates in the Knob Creek school taught by Zachariah Riney and Caleb Hazel. One of the boys in the school, Austin Gollaher, who was often with the Lincoln children, claimed that Sarah was his childhood sweetheart. Gollaher told one who interviewed him in his later years that "Sally was a very pretty girl and I loved her and claimed her as boys do." As Sally was but nine years old when the family left for Indiana her love affair with Gollaher could not have been a very serious one. The most vivid memory of the Kentucky days probably was directed to a brother, Thomas, four years younger than she, who died in infancy.

The removal of the Lincoln family to Indiana in 1816 did not mean that they went to live among strangers as it is evident that Sarah had some cousins living in the same county not far away and also many acquaintances of her parents had moved there. Two years later, however, when she was but eleven years of age, her mother died. The responsibility of caring for the home evolved upon her and for more than a year she was the housekeeper for her father and brother.

The second marriage of her father must have pleased Sarah for she was relieved from the responsibilities of the care of the home and also found two congenial playmates in the two daughters of her stepmother; one, Elizabeth, just her own age, and Matilda, four years younger. It is likely that Sarah attended school with the Johnson children and her brother, Abraham.

The descriptions which we have of Sarah are all in agreement and this brief one by her own stepmother may be accepted: "She was short of stature and somewhat plump in build, her hair was dark brown and her eyes were grey."

Aside from the entry in the family Bible recording her birth the first reference to Sarah Lincoln appearing on record is in the minute book of Pigeon Church. On April 8, 1826, there is inscribed this entry, "Received Sister Sally Lincoln by experience of grace." She was then nineteen years of age. Her father and stepmother were both members of the congregation as well as her stepsister, Elizabeth. It is quite likely that when Sally joined the church she was already planning for her wedding as church affiliation and matrimony went hand in hand in those days.

In the summer of 1826 a new family by the name of Crawford moved into the community and settled next to the Grigsbys. As Sarah often went out to assist neighbors who were in need of help it is likely that Sarah was for a short time employed to assist Mrs. Crawford, who had small children including an infant in arms. How long Sarah had been keeping company with Aaron Grigsby we do not know but they had been to school together and both attended the same church. Sarah Lincoln's presence in the Crawford home next to the Grigsbys may have hastened the betrothal of these young people. On August 2, 1826, Charles Harper united in marriage Aaron Grigsby and Sarah Lincoln as recorded in the records of Spencer County.

The Grigsbys were plain pioneer people like the Lincolns and Sally Lincoln was sure to have a good home. It is reasonable to expect that her father would present her, upon her marriage, with as much as was required of a guardian at the expiration of his guardianship. The law gave an orphan girl who was bound out the following property as her rightful heritage: "A new feather bed, with all necessary clothing, with pillow and bolster, all of decent home manufacturing." She would also have suitable clothing as a wedding gift and undoubtedly a cow and calf as a part of her dowry. Whether or not Thomas Lincoln was able to present her with a horse and saddle we are unable to say.

Much purely traditional matter and a large volume of untenable data has been written about this wedding as far as Abraham Lincoln's connection with it is concerned but most of it is pure fiction. The wedding undoubtedly took place in the Lincoln cabin and was

probably like most pioneer weddings.

The married life of Sarah Lincoln Grigsby was brief, however, for, about one year and a half later, on January 20, 1828, she passed away in childbirth. A story of her death comes down to us from Captain J. W. Lamar, who lived in the community.

"A great grief which affected Abe through life was caused by the death of his only sister, Sally. They were close companions and were a great deal alike in temperament. About a year after her marriage to one of the Grigsbys she died. This was a hard blow to Abe who always thought her death was due to neglect. Abe was in a little smokehouse when the news came to him that she had died. He came to the door and sat down burying his face in his hands. The tears trickled through his large fingers, and sobs shook his frame. From then on he was alone in the world, you might say." Mrs. Lamar added this comment to the testimony of her husband, "I remember the night she died. My mother was there at the time. She had a very strong voice and I heard her calling father. He awoke the boys and said, 'Something is the matter.' He went after the doctor but it was too late. They let her lay too long. My old aunt was the midwife."

One of the members of the Grigsby family adds this further comment about Sarah and her husband:

"Sally Lincoln lived but a short time after the marriage and her husband died about three years later. They had a very bright future before them for the people of that day and Sally Grigsby was much thought of and loved by all her husband's people. She was given the best kind of burial that could be given and my father erected a sand stone marker on the graves of both she and her husband, and always looked after these graves as well as the others of our family as long as he lived."

The grave of Sarah Lincoln in the Pigeon Church cemetery is now marked by a fine monument erected on May 30, 1916. It bears this inscription:

SARAH LINCOLN
WIFE OF
AARON GRIGSBY
FEB. 10, 1807
JAN. 20, 1828

While the burial places of Sarah Lincoln and her mother are some distance apart they are now within the same reservation controlled by the State of Indiana which assures that they will be well cared for forever.