

# LINCOLN LORE

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## LINCOLN THE SURVEYOR

A compass and a grapevine were the only instruments used in establishing the boundaries of many pioneer towns that grew up in the American wilderness. Surveyors, more than the members of any other profession, were associated with the opening of new territories and the establishment of thoroughfares. Their task was the marking of ways and places.

Having chosen to make a geographical approach in the study of Lincoln for 1934, it seems timely to call attention in this issue of Lincoln Lore to Abraham Lincoln's activities as a surveyor.

Lincoln was offered the position of deputy surveyor of Sangamon County by John Calhoun, the surveyor. As the offer came at the time Lincoln was very much interested in becoming a member of the legislature, he made it quite plain to Calhoun, who was of different political faith, that he was in no wise to be bound politically by the appointment, if he accepted, and that he was to be allowed to "express his opinions on government affairs as freely and frequently as he chose."

Calhoun was but three years older than Lincoln, so we must not conclude that any fatherly interest prompted the selection. Inasmuch as Calhoun became a representative in 1838, it is likely that he felt that Lincoln's popularity might be of some political assistance to him although he belonged to the opposite party.

The thorough mathematical training which Lincoln had received during his Indiana school days came to good advantage, as is evident from an autobiographical sketch, written in the third person, which reveals how rapidly he was able to acquire the rudiments necessary to begin his duties:

"The surveyor of Sangamon offered to depute to Abraham that portion of his work which was within his part of the county. He accepted, procured a compass and chain, studied Flint and Gibson a little and went at it. This procured bread, and kept soul and body together."

One of the books Lincoln used was "The Theory and Practice of Surveying" by Robert Gibson. The original copy of the volume he studied, which was published in 1814, is said to contain his autograph on several pages.

### The First Survey

Just one hundred years ago, on January 14, Abraham Lincoln submitted a report of the first survey he is known to have made. The certificate reads as follows:

"1834, Jan. 14. Surveyed for Rupel Godby—the West half of the North East quarter of Section 30 in Township 19 North of Range 6 West. Beginning at a

White Oak 12 inches in diameter leaving N 34 E 84 Link, a White Oak 10 inches S 58 W 98 Link, Thence South 40 chains to a White Oak 12 inches, N 73 E 20 Link, Thence East 20 chains to a Black Oak 12 inches, S 54 W 16 Links—Thence North 40 chains to a post and mound. Thence West 20 chains to the beginning.  
Chainman J. Calhoun, L. L. C.  
Hercules Demming By A. Lincoln"

### Sangamo Town—Athens Road

Lincoln was called upon many times to assist in the surveying of roads. In 1834 he was appointed a member of a commission "to view and relocate a part of the road between Sangamo Town and Athens." On November 4, a report was made by the commission drawn up by Lincoln with the following statement appended:

"Herewith is the map—The court may allow me the following charges if they think proper:

1 day's labor as surveyor.....\$3.00  
Making map ..... .50

\$3.50

A. Lincoln."

### New Boston, Illinois

Possibly the first town Lincoln was called upon to survey was over one hundred miles away from his New Salem home. It was evidently a task performed for his former associate in the Black Hawk War, Captain Elijah Iles. The troops had touched the Mississippi at a point near the mouth of Henderson River, and it was just north of this point on a bank overlooking the Mississippi that Iles had acquired the piece of land where he had Abraham Lincoln survey the town of New Boston. Lincoln made a detailed map of the town showing the owners of the lots. One of the citations is as follows: "The lots marked Iles and out lots marked Elijah Iles belong to Elijah Iles of Sangamon County."

Appended to the plot of the town of New Boston is the following certificate: "I do certify that the above is an accurate plot of the town of New Boston, as surveyed by me. A Lincoln for Peter Butler, Surveyor for the County of Warren." The plot was acknowledged by the surveyor on September 30, 1834, and also entered as an exhibit in the Deed Record "B" of the Mercer County Court on July 12, 1836.

In 1928, when a paved road was constructed through the main street of New Boston, one of the original corner stones set by Lincoln was removed. It is hoped that some one has had foresight enough to conserve the old stone, which might well serve as a monu-

ment to Lincoln's activities as a surveyor.

### Deputy Surveyor a Second Term

On September 12, 1835, a notice appeared in the Sangamon Journal announcing that Thomas M. Neale, newly elected surveyor of Sangamon County, had appointed John Calhoun and Abraham Lincoln as his deputies. Neale had been one of the thirteen candidates for representative to the general assembly at the same time Lincoln made his first race in 1832; Neale's total was 571 and Lincoln's 657. It is evident that some political considerations were responsible for Lincoln's second appointment as deputy surveyor.

### Albany, Illinois

Photographic copies of the map which Abraham Lincoln made from his surveys for the town of Albany indicate that he was a painstaking draftsman. The whole work is neatly done; the writing especially is in a very clear legible hand. The central street he called Meridian Street, and the three cross streets were designated as First, Second, and Third Streets. The plot contained a public square and fifty-six lots. The land surveyed was owned by John Wright and John Donovan.

The following certificate appears under the map with date and signatures:

"I hereby certify that the above is a correct map of the town of Albany, as surveyed by me.

A. Lincoln.

for T. M. Neale, S. S. C.  
June 16, 1836.

### Petersburg, Illinois

It must have been with some reluctance that Lincoln accepted the task of making surveys for the town of Petersburg. By the year 1836 it was quite evident that New Salem would be overshadowed by the community growing up but one mile to the north. All will agree that Petersburg spelled the doom of New Salem, and it must have pained Lincoln to contribute to the settlement of Petersburg by making surveys for further development of the town. Some accounts of his labors claim it was a task of several weeks. The surveys at Petersburg were concluded by February 22, 1836, the date on which the plot was recorded.

As late as 1859 Abraham Lincoln was called upon by a surveyor's convention assembled at Chicago to give an opinion with respect to some point. The convention realizing that Lincoln himself had been a surveyor, felt he would be best qualified to pass upon the point in question. He submitted his opinion in writing on January 6, 1859.