

# LINCOLN LORE

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## THE DATE AND PLACE OF LINCOLN'S BIRTH

The one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth invites a review of the available evidence which fixes the date and place of his nativity. No vital statistics were kept in Kentucky during the days the Lincolns lived there, so we will not expect to find an official record of his birth.

It becomes necessary, first of all, to determine the location of the home in which Lincoln's parents were living at the time he is supposed to have been born. On December 12, 1808, the father, Thomas Lincoln, purchased 300 acres of land near the South Fork of Nolin River in Hardin County, Kentucky, and there is every reason to believe that he took possession immediately.

In 1809 the name of Thomas Lincoln, which had been entered regularly for six years on the Commissioner's Books of Hardin County, appeared in a new district which included the citizens living in the neighborhood of the South Fork of Nolin. This fact confirms the supposition that the Lincolns were living on the farm acquired in 1808 and establishes their residence in that part of Hardin County which later became LaRue.

The first direct reference to Abraham Lincoln in a duly authorized document is found in the 1810 United States Census report at Washington, D. C. He is referred to as "one white male under ten years of age." On this record Thomas Lincoln, as head of the family, is entered as living in Hardin County, Kentucky. The report reveals that there were four people in the family: one male under ten years of age, one male between twenty-six and forty-five, one female under ten years of age, and one female between twenty-six and forty-five. These citations refer to Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Lincoln, Sarah Lincoln, and Nancy Hanks Lincoln respectively. The United States census for 1820 indicates that Abraham Lincoln was between ten and sixteen years of age at that time.

Possibly the first occasion in which Abraham's signature appears, in connection with a date associated with his age, is his voting at the Clary Grove precinct in Sangamon County on August 1, 1831. Sometime previous to this date he must have reached his twenty-first year.

Usually the family Bible is the first place we look for the birth record of a

child born in the pioneer days. Here in Lincoln's own handwriting is recorded this entry:

"Abraham Lincoln son of Thomas & Nancy Lincoln was born February 12, 1809."

One of Abraham Lincoln's relatives by the name of David Lincoln wrote to him in 1848 and made some inquiries about his family. He replied on April 2:

"My father, Thomas, is still living in Coles County, Illinois, being in his seventy-first year of his age... I am his only child. I am now in my fortieth year."

Lanham, the compiler of the Dictionary of Congress, sent to Mr. Lincoln in 1850 the usual request for an autobiographical sketch to appear in the publication. The first line of the data he supplied follows:

"Born February 12, 1809, in Hardin County, Kentucky."

I was born February 12th, 1809, in then Hardin County, Kentucky, at a point within the new county of LaRue, a mile or a mile and a half from where Hodgen's Mill now is.  
A. Lincoln.

On December 20, 1859, a brief sketch was prepared by Lincoln for Jesse Fell in which he said:

"I was born February 12, 1809, in Hardin County, Kentucky... removed from Kentucky to what is now Spencer County, Indiana, in my eighth year (1816)... At twenty-one I came to Macon County, Illinois (1830)." All of these ages and dates confirm his previous statements about the time of his birth.

Some correspondence which he carried on with Samuel Haycraft of Elizabethtown, Kentucky, in 1860, presents both positive and negative testimonials about his birth place:

"I was not born in Elizabethtown but my mother's first child, a daughter two years older than myself and now long since deceased, was. I was born February 12, 1809, near where Hodginsville now is then in Hardin County."

In another letter to Haycraft a few days later Lincoln said:

"The place on Knob Creek mentioned by Mr. Reed I remember very

well but I was not born there. As my parents have told me I was born on Nolin, very much nearer Hodgen's Mill than the Knob Creek place is. My earliest recollection, however, is of the Knob Creek place."

Some time after this correspondence Lincoln had occasion to refer to the Haycraft inquiry again in a letter written to George G. Fogg. Here he mentions his birthplace again:

"Soon after the Chicago nomination I was written to by a highly respectable gentleman of Hardin County, Kentucky, inquiring if I was a son of Thomas Lincoln, whom he had known long ago in the county. I answered that I was and that I was myself born there."

One of the first newspaper men to interview Lincoln after his nomination was John Locke Scripps. He persuaded Lincoln to write a brief biographical sketch which he prepared in the third person. It contained these references to his birthplace and age:

"Abraham Lincoln was born February 12, 1809, then in Hardin County, now in the more recently formed County of LaRue, Kentucky... Moved to Indiana in the Autumn of 1816, Abraham then being in his eighth year... On March 1, 1830 Abraham Lincoln had just completed his twenty-first year."

On June 14, 1860, an artist by the name of Hicks asked Mr. Lincoln for a brief sketch of his life. The review contained this paragraph:

"I was born February 12th, 1809, in then Hardin County, Kentucky, at a point within the new County of LaRue, a mile or a mile and a half from where Hodgen's Mill now is. My parents being dead, and my own memory not serving, I know no means of identifying the precise locality. It was on Nolin Creek."

The fact that Lincoln stated in this sketch that he had "no means of identifying the precise locality" has encouraged some people to discount all he ever said about his birthplace. At least five times he wrote he was born in old Hardin County and twice mentioned it was in that section that later became LaRue County. Three times he mentioned the water course, Nolin, on which his father's farm was situated. At least five times he mentioned Hodgen's Mill or Hodgenville and finally stated the approximate distance of his birthplace from this point.

It appears from the evidence gathered that there should be no confusion as to when and where Abraham Lincoln was born.