

# LINCOLN LORE

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## ABRAHAM LINCOLN A Concise Biography

Kentucky—First Seven Years  
1809-1816

Abraham Lincoln was born on Sunday, February 12, 1809. The humble cabin birthplace stood close by a noted cave spring in what is now LaRue County, Kentucky. It was like most of the log buildings in which the pioneers lived—no better, no worse.

The parents of Abraham, Thomas and Nancy Hanks Lincoln, were descendants of honorable and intelligent Virginians. They were married on June 12, 1806, at Beechland, Washington County, Kentucky, in the community where they grew up. The father, although uneducated, was able to write his name in a good legible hand, and the mother was a ready reader. Both were deeply religious and became active members of an anti-slavery church.

The Lincolns' first child, Sarah, was about two years older than Abraham, and a third child, Thomas, Jr., died in infancy. When Abraham was two years of age, the family moved to a more productive farm, situated on Knob Creek, eight miles north of the birthplace. The parents were poor, like most of the pioneers, but they were never poverty stricken. Thomas Lincoln was in possession of between seven and eight hundred acres of land when Abraham was born, and one year listed four horses for taxation.

A log school house which Sarah and Abraham attended for two terms stood on the Old Cumberland Road, a mile and a half from their home. Their teachers were Zachariah Riney and Caleb Hazel, who were both well qualified to serve as their instructors.

Indiana—Fourteen Formative Years  
1816-1830

In the fall of 1816 the Lincolns migrated to Indiana and settled in what is now Spencer County. Two years later a scourge known as "milk sickness" swept the community and claimed among its victims the mother of Abraham Lincoln. She died on October 5, 1818, and was buried on a hill just opposite the cabin home.

In the month of December, 1819, Thomas Lincoln visited Kentucky and while there married the widow Johnston. She was the mother of three children, Elizabeth, Matilda, and John D., whose ages were 12, 8, and 4 years respectively. These children were reared in the Indiana cabin with the Lincoln orphans—Sarah, aged 12, and Abraham, age 10. Another orphan, Dennis Hanks, some years older than the other children, found a home with the Lincolns also.

Three brief terms of school taught by Andrew Crawford, James Swaney, and Azel W. Dorsey, respectively, were attended by Abraham Lincoln in Indiana. He had as much schooling as the average pioneer boy. Dilworth's Speller, Murray's English Reader, and Pike's Arithmetic were the principal school books. The Bible, Pilgrim's Progress, Aesop's Fables, Weems' Washington, Weems' Marion, Ramsey's Washington, Scott's Lessons, Columbia Class Book, and the Kentucky Preceptor were some of the books which came into Abraham's hands during his school days.

When Abraham was sixteen years of age, he secured work on a ferry boat at the mouth of Anderson River, twelve miles from his home. Three years later, as a hired hand, he made a trip down the Ohio River in a flatboat, and for the first time observed slaves sold over the auction block, which deeply impressed him. Just about the time of his river trip in 1828, his sister, Sarah Lincoln Grigsby, died, so that only Abraham and his father were left of the original family that came to Indiana from Kentucky. Upon Abraham's return from New Orleans he served as a

clerk in a country store. The proprietor was a great admirer of Henry Clay and subscribed for some Whig newspapers which greatly influenced Abraham. A history of the United States, biographies of Clay and Webster, the Statutes of Indiana, and many other books of importance were read by Lincoln at this time.

Fourteen years, or one quarter of Lincoln's whole life, were spent in the Indiana wilderness. Here he grew from a child seven years of age to a man twenty-one years old when he reached his full height of six feet four inches, and is said to have weighed two hundred pounds. He excelled in all kinds of athletics, and his great strength has become proverbial.

Illinois Country—Seven Years  
1830-1837

On March 1, 1830, Thomas Lincoln and twelve others, including his wife, his son Abraham, and the stepchildren with their families, set out for Illinois. Thomas had no children by his second marriage. Upon arriving at a point near Decatur, Abraham helped his father build a cabin, assisted in fencing the place, and then left home to make his own way in the world.

A second flatboat trip was made to New Orleans in 1831, and upon his return Abraham was employed as a clerk in a store at New Salem, Illinois. Here he cast his first vote on August 1, 1831, and also served as clerk of the election. Seven months later, at the age of twenty-three, he announced himself a candidate for the Legislature, and his written platform reveals an orderly presentation of the issues before the people. Shortly after his announcement, the Black Hawk War broke out. Lincoln enlisted immediately and was elected captain of his company. He was mustered out at Whitewater, Wisconsin, without seeing active service. Arriving back in New Salem a few days before the election, with little opportunity to campaign in a race where four were to be elected, he ran seventh in the group of ten candidates.

The first independent business venture in which Lincoln engaged was a partnership in a store. This led to his appointment as postmaster for the town of New Salem, but the store failed, and the post office was discontinued. In the meantime he had become a Deputy Surveyor of Sangamon County.

The choice of a profession, political success, and romance all began in Lincoln's life about the same time: encouraged by his friend, John T. Stuart, he commenced to study law in earnest; running again for the Legislature in 1834, he was one of the four victorious candidates; and, after paying some attention to Ann Rutledge, a romance of much promise ended the following year with the death of his betrothed. His mother, his only sister, and his sweetheart, all were now dead.

Springfield, Illinois—First Decade  
1837-1847

A new era dawned for Abraham Lincoln in 1837, when three important events occurred: his official protest against slavery was registered in the Illinois Legislature; his removal to Springfield changed his domestic life; and the law partnership formed with John T. Stuart paved the way for legal success. When Lincoln was returned to the Legislature, he became the recognized spokesman for the "Long Nine," representatives of Sangamon County—all men six feet tall or over. Elected again for the third consecutive time he became Whig floor leader. He was largely instrumental in the removal of the state capital from Vandalia to Springfield. The last two times he served in the Assembly he received the complimentary vote of the minority for Speaker of the House.

(To be continued)

Note—This issue of Lincoln Lore contains the first of three installments which will comprise a concise biography of Abraham Lincoln.