

LINCOLN LORE

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MY EARLY ADVENTURES IN ILLINOIS—A. LINCOLN

I was raised to farm work, which I continued until I was twenty-two. At twenty-one I came to Illinois, Macon County, where my father and family settled. Here we built a log cabin into which we removed, and made sufficient rails to fence 10 acres of ground. Fenced and broke the ground, and raised a crop of sown corn upon it the same year. These are or are supposed to be, the rails about which so much is being said just now, though these are far from being the first or only rails ever made by me.

During the winter of the very celebrated deep snow in Illinois, John D. Johnston, John Hanks, and I hired ourselves to Denton Offutt to take a flatboat from Beardstown, Illinois, to New Orleans and for that purpose were to join Offutt at Springfield, Illinois, so soon as the snow should go off. When it did go off about the first of March, 1831, the country was so flooded as to make traveling by land impractical; to obviate which difficulty we purchased a large canoe and came down the Sangamon River in it. This is the time and manner of my first entrance into Sangamon County.

We found Offutt at Springfield but learned from him that he had failed in getting a boat at Beardstown. This led to our hiring ourselves to him for twelve dollars per month each and getting the timber out of the trees and building a boat at old Sangamon Town on the Sangamon River seven miles northwest of Springfield. In company with others I commenced the building of a flatboat and finished and took her out in the course of the spring. Since that time I have been concerned in the mill at New Salem. The time at which we crossed the mill-dam being the last days of April, the water was lower than it had been since the breaking of winter in February or than it was for several weeks after. The principal difficulties we encountered in descending the river were from the drifted timber which obstructions all know are not difficult to be removed. We took the boat to New Orleans, substantially upon the old contract. Hanks had not gone to New Orleans but having a family and being likely to be detained from home longer than he first expected had turned back at St. Louis.

In July, 1831, I stopped indefinitely for the first time, as it were by myself in New Salem. Here I rapidly made acquaintances and friends. In less than a year Offutt's business was failing—had almost failed—when the Black Hawk War of 1832 broke out.

I joined a volunteer company, and, to my own surprise, was elected captain of it. I have not since had any success in life which has given me so much satisfaction. Received April 28, 1832, for the use of the Sangamon County Company under my command, thirty muskets, bayonets, screws and wipes.

Captain A. Lincoln's Company of Mounted Volunteers of Illinois Militia mustered out of service at the mouth of Fox River, May 27, 1832: Abraham Lincoln, Capt.; Samuel M. Thompson, 1st Lieut.; John Brannen, 2nd Lieut.; John Armstrong, 1st Sergt.; Tavner B. Anderson, 2nd Sergt.; George W. Foster, 3rd Sergt.; Obadiah Morgan, 4th Sergt.; Thomas Combs, 1st Corp.; John Plaster, 2nd Corp.; William F. Berry, 3rd Corp.; Alexander Trent, 4th Corp.; Privates: John Erwin, John H. Houghton, Thomas Pierce, Samuel Tibbs, Henry Hadley, Samuel Dutton, Calvin Pierce, Joseph Tibbs, William Kirkpatrick, Cyrus Elmore, Elijah Pierce, Lewis W. Farmer, Bordry Matthews, Ep. Sulivan, Valentine Crete, Charles Sullivan, James Simmons, Hugh Armstrong, Allen King, Joseph Dobson, David Rankin, Urbin Alexander, Henry Cox, Merrit M. Carman, Royal Potter, David M. Pantier, Joseph Hohimer, George Warburton, Evan T. Lamb, Clardey Barnette, John M. Rutledge, William Cox, Usil Mecker, Richard Jones, Charles Pierce, James Clemment, John Y. Lane, Richard Lane, Royal Clary, Pleasant Armstrong, James Yardley,

David Rutledge, Michael Plaster, John Mounce, William Hohimer, Isaac Anderson, William Marshall, William Cummins, John Jones, Traveice Elmore, William Foster, Nathan Drake, Robert S. Plunkett, William T. Spruce, William Clary, Jacob Heaverer, Isaac Gulther.

Samuel M. Thompson, 1st Lieut., resigned April 30; John Brannen, 2nd Lieut., absent on extra duty; George W. Foster, 3rd Sergt., transferred to a foot company, April 29th; Obadiah Morgan, 4th Sergt., absent on furlough; John Plaster, 2nd Corp., resigned May 20, and served as a private since; John Erwin, private, promoted to 3rd Sergeant in room of G. W. Foster, April 29; William Kirkpatrick, private, promoted from the ranks, April 30; Hugh Armstrong, private, promoted to 1st Lieutenant, April 30; David Rankin, private, transferred to a foot company, May 19th; Richard Jones, private, promoted from the ranks, May 2; Michael Plaster, private, absent without leave; John Mounce, private, absent without leave; John Jones, private, absent without leave; William Foster, private, transferred to a foot company, April 29; William T. Spruce, private, from the ranks, May 2.

I went the campaign, served near three months, met the ordinary hardships of such an expedition, but was in no battle. I had a good many bloody struggles with the mosquitoes and although I never fainted from the loss of blood, I can truly say I was often very hungry. I bent a musket pretty badly on one occasion—by accident. I did not break my sword for I had none to break. I was not at Stillman's defeat but I saw the place very soon afterwards. I now own in Iowa land upon which my own warrants for the service were located.

Returning from the campaign and encouraged by my great popularity among my neighbors, the same year ran for the legislature and was beaten—my own precinct, however, casting its votes 277 for and 7 against me—that too while I was an avowed Clay man and the precinct the autumn afterward given a majority of 115 to General Jackson over Mr. Clay. This was the only time I was ever beaten by a direct vote of the people.

I was now without means and out of business, but was anxious to remain with my friends who had treated me with so much generosity, especially as I had nothing elsewhere to go to. I studied what I should do—thought of learning the blacksmith trade—thought of trying to study law—rather thought I could not succeed at that without a better education.

Before long, strangely enough, a man offered to sell, and did sell, to me and another as poor as myself an old stock of goods, upon credit. We opened as merchants. Of course we did nothing but get deeper and deeper in debt. The store winked out.

I was appointed post master at New Salem, the office being too insignificant to make my politics an objection.

The surveyor of Sangamon offered to deputize me that portion of his work which was in my part of the county. I 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.

The election of 1834 came, and I was then elected to the legislature by the highest vote cast for any candidate. Major John T. Stuart, then in full practice of the law, was also elected. During the canvass, in a private conversation he encouraged me (to) study law.

After the election I borrowed books of Stuart, took them home with me, and went at it in good earnest. I studied with nobody. I still mixed in the surveying to pay board and clothing bills. When the legislature met, the law-books were dropped, but were taken up again at the end of the session.