

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN'S RETURN TRIP FROM NEW ORLEANS

One hundred and ten years ago in the spring of 1828, Abraham Lincoln made his first trip to New Orleans on a flatboat. The boat was launched at Rockport on the Ohio River about twenty miles from his Indiana home. The trip down the river was an extremely eventful one as Lincoln has revealed in one of his autobiographical sketches. Little is known, however, about the return passage upstream and it was so overshadowed in point of interest when compared to his trip down the river that apparently he did not think it worth while to comment on.

There is but one brief statement, as far as is known, in which Lincoln made a direct reference to his progress up the river by steamboat and it may have referred to either the 1828 or the 1831 trip. The authority for the story was George H. Yeaman of Kentucky, who upon a visit to the White House recalled the following incident. He said:

"Examining a large military map hanging against the wall, Mr. Lincoln approached me and pointed out where the Mississippi river once made a horseshoe bend, nearly a complete circuit, around which he went on a flatboat in descending the river, and pointed out where the river broke through the narrow peninsula, while he was at New Orleans, making a new channel through which the pilot, on the up journey, guided the steamer, where it was dry land on the down trip."

James Gentry, brother of Allen Gentry with whom Abraham Lincoln made the trip in 1828, states that both of the young men returned from New Orleans by steamboat as "deck" passengers. This, as far as is known, was Abraham Lincoln's first experience for any long run on this type of river craft.

It has been difficult to ascertain with any degree of certainty the exact dates on which this first flatboat trip was made, although Lincoln was supposed to have gone to work constructing the boat about March first. We do know that Allen Gentry, who accompanied Lincoln, was married to Kate Robey at Rockport on March 20, 1828, so that the date of departure must have been some time after the marriage.

The date of arrival in New Orleans is also unknown as it is problematical how much time was spent by the navigators in trading along the sugar coast. Lamon, on some unknown authority, states that Lincoln returned to Indiana in June which is a somewhat later date than is generally accepted.

The editor of *Lincoln Lore* has made a careful search in New Orleans for some reference to the arrival there of the Rockport flatboat but although hundreds of these river craft are listed with the names of owners and the amount of produce and merchandise on board, one looks in vain for the name of Gentry and Lincoln.

Assuming that they were in New Orleans along the last of April and were at that time seeking passage home, they would have had no difficulty in finding plenty of boats booked for Louisville and Cincinnati. In case they were ready to return by April 16, they would have found the steamer, *Amazon*, ready to embark.

A newspaper account of the steamship, *Amazon*, which arrived in Louisville, Kentucky, from New Orleans on April 25, 1828, gives a good idea of the traffic on the Ohio at this time. This news item is excerpted from the *Vincennes Sun* of that period.

"The steamboat, *Amazon*, under Capt. Paul, arrived in Louisville on the 25th inst. from New Orleans in nine days from port to port with a cargo of 384 tons, eighty-three cabin and four hundred and thirty-one deck passengers. The *Amazon* made the trip from Louisville to New Orleans and back in less than three weeks. Let the Eastern steamboats beat this in speed, quantity of cargo or in number of passengers."

The newspapers of New Orleans give a good picture of the city as it must have appeared at the time of Lincoln's first visit and of special interest is the visualization of the harbor craft from the following shipping reports for April 26, 1828: Vessels in port: Ships, 66; brigs, 85; schooners, 30; sloops, 6; steamboats, 20.

These various seagoing vessels were bound for the following points: Liverpool; Harve; Bordeaux; Hamburg; Gibraltar; Aberdeen; Bremen; Laguna; Vera Cruz; Rio Grande; Philadelphia; New York; Bristol, R. I.; Boston; Baltimore; Providence; Portland; and Pensacola.

It would be impossible to estimate the number of flatboats which were in the process of being unloaded while Lincoln was in the busy port. In May, the newspaper announced that thirty-nine flatboats had arrived from Kentucky and Tennessee in one day.

The names of boats, names of captains, destinations, and dates of departure for steamboats up the river appear in the paper of April 26th: *Feliciana*—Capt. Voorhees, Louisville, date not known; *Lady of the Lake*—Capt. Kimball, Louisville, April 27; *The New York*—Capt. Smith, Cincinnati, April 26; *Belle Creole*—Capt. Perry, Louisville, April 26; *Belvedere*—Capt. Morris, Cincinnati, April 30.

It will be observed how difficult it would be to point out the steamer on which Lincoln may have traveled up the river. Among other Louisville steamers making regular trips at this time were the *Montezuma*, Capt. Ed-wardson; *Atlanta*, Capt. Barlow; *Crusader*, Capt. Jackson; and *General Wayne*, Capt. Master.

A Louisville newspaper for May 5, 1828, states that the steamboats *George Washington*, *General Wayne*, and *Daniel Boone* had just arrived in port from New Orleans and delivered a big store of goods to Isaac Lyon, a large part of which was sold by auction. The merchandise included a large quantity of sugar, brandy, wine, shaving soap, Russian cloth, and spices.

Lincoln must have thoroughly enjoyed the trip up the Ohio River in the spring of 1828, and possibly some day there may be discovered the exact date on which he embarked and the name of the steamship on which he made his first voyage in a power driven craft.