

LINCOLN LORE

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THE LINCOLNS AND THE METHODIST CLERGY

Carlisle once said, "The religion of a man is the chief fact concerning him." If this be true it is quite important to observe the contacts of the Lincoln family with ministers of various faiths. The Methodist Church presents an interesting and impressive group of clergymen who greatly influenced Lincoln directly and indirectly; Benjamin Ogden, Jesse Head, George L. Rogers, Peter Cartright, and Matthew Simpson.

Jesse Head

In the community where Thomas Lincoln grew to manhood and where Nancy Hanks was living in the home of her Uncle Richard Berry, there also resided a preacher of the Methodist faith by the name of Jesse Head. He was born in Frederick County, Maryland, on June 10, 1768, and as early as 1797 he had arrived in Kentucky.

The Washington County Court on February 7, 1803, authorized him to "solemnize the rites of matrimony" and three years later on June 12, he served as officiating clergyman at the wedding of Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks, two young people whom he had known personally for many years. The duly recorded certificate of the marriage he performed for the future parents of Abraham Lincoln may be observed in the clerk's office of the Washington County, Kentucky, courthouse.

Benjamin Ogden

"The First Western Cavalier" is the title given to Benjamin Ogden by Redford, a Methodist historian of note who wrote, "His name was the synonym of courage and suffering. He had alone traversed the wilds, swum its rivers and encountered difficulty and danger." In 1786, at the age of twenty-two, Ogden was the only preacher in Kentucky named in the minutes of the Methodist Church.

After Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks were married by Jesse Head in Washington County they moved immediately to Elizabethtown where Thomas Lincoln had already been closely associated with Ben Ogden who had been living in Elizabethtown for many years. Like most of the early ministers, he supplemented his religious work with manual labor. Ogden followed the occupation of cabinet maker. Thomas Lincoln was closely associated with him as their names appear together on many documents. As early as the year 1800, Ogden was in Elizabethtown and for the next few years joined more young people in matrimony than any of the ministers in the county. On March 13, 1806, he

officiated at the wedding of Daniel Johnston and Sarah Bush. Sarah Bush Johnston later became the step-mother of Abraham Lincoln.

George L. Rogers

The marriage of Thomas Lincoln to his second wife, the widow Sarah Bush Johnston, was solemnized on December 2, 1819, in Elizabethtown, Kentucky, by Rev. George L. Rogers. It is important to note that on both occasions when a marriage was anticipated by Sarah, she sought out a Methodist clergyman to perform the ceremony, indicating that she was closely associated with this church body if not affiliated with it.

Rogers was born in Farquier County, Virginia, on April 30, 1793. After migrating to Kentucky he was ordained a Deacon by Marcus Lindsey and an elder by Bishop Soule. He produced credentials of his ordination on February 2, 1819, which gave him the authority to "celebrate the rites of matrimony" and that same year officiated at the Lincoln-Johnston wedding. Rogers was termed a local preacher and followed the trade of wheelwright and chair maker. He lived to be ninety-nine years of age.

Peter Cartright

No name among Lincoln's early political opponents has become more familiar than that of Peter Cartright. He was probably known to Lincoln's father and mother as he preached for a while in Washington County, Kentucky in 1805, as is evident from this record which appears on the county order book of that year.

"On the motion of Peter Cartright, a minister of the gospel of the Methodist Church, he having made oath and with Samuel Poter and Jesse Head, his security executed and acknowledged bond as the law directs a testimonial is granted him to solemnize the rites of marriage."

Lincoln first encountered the Methodist circuit rider when they were both candidates for the Legislature from Sangamon County in 1832. This time Cartright was one of the four successful candidates while Lincoln failed to place among the four men to be elected. It was in 1846, however, when the real battle for political supremacy was waged between Lincoln and Cartright, this time Lincoln being the successful candidate. This interesting contest has been kept alive in the memories of the people by the traditional story which claims that during the Congressional race Lincoln attended a religious meeting in which Cartright, the minister, asked how

many wanted to go to heaven. Lincoln not replying in the affirmative, Cartright asked him where he wanted to go. "To Congress," Lincoln answered.

Methodist Ministers Committee

While Lincoln was personally acquainted with several Methodist clergymen he was on one occasion visited by a committee of Methodist ministers from a conference assembled in Philadelphia. To their address of assurance of the unfaltering support of Methodists, Lincoln replied:

"Gentlemen,

"In response to your address, allow me to attest the accuracy of its historical statements; indorse the sentiments it expresses; and thank you, in the nation's name for the sure promise it gives.

"Nobly sustained as the government has been by all the churches, I would utter nothing which might, in the least, appear invidious against any. Yet, without this, it may fairly be said that the Methodist Episcopal Church, not less devoted than the best, is by its greater numbers, the most important of all. It is no fault in others that the Methodist Church sends more soldiers to the field, more nurses to the hospital, and more prayers to Heaven than any. God bless the Methodist Church—bless all the churches—and blessed be God, who, in this our great trial, giveth us the churches.

"A. Lincoln"

Matthew Simpson

The most distinguished of all the Methodist clergymen with whom Lincoln came in contact was Bishop Simpson. His acquaintance with the President began in Illinois and he was a frequent visitor at the White House during the war. On occasions Bishop Simpson was called into conferences with the President and at the opening of the Sanitary Fair in Philadelphia, President Lincoln requested that the Bishop represent him and give the opening address.

Bishop Simpson delivered the closing eulogy of a long series of tributes which had been paid to the departed Lincoln. He seems to have been selected for this office as America's outstanding clergyman who was closely associated with the President. The closing words of Bishop Simpson's funeral oration over the body of Lincoln follow:

"We crown thee as our martyr, and Humanity enthrones thee as her triumphant son. Hero, martyr, friend, farewell."