

# LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor,  
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Number 480

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

June 20, 1938

## THE LINCOLNS CROSSING THE WABASH

The Lincoln family crossing the Wabash River and for the first time entering the state of Illinois was memorialized on Flag Day, June 14, at a point in Lawrence County opposite the city of Vincennes. The Illinois Daughters of the American Revolution were responsible for the erection of the impressive memorial in a thirty-two acres park, acquired by the state as a proper setting for the monument.

The dedication of a sculptural group depicting the migrating Lincolns was the occasion for the exercises. The work of art by Nellie V. Walker of Chicago, shows in a bas relief on a limestone panel, 10 x 12 feet, various members of the Lincoln family and ox team, and standing out from the engaged figures is a heroic bronze statue of Abraham Lincoln.

This statuary is a distinct contribution to our understanding of an important historical episode in the career of Abraham Lincoln. It introduces him to the state of Illinois at twenty-one years of age, a man grown who is soon to start out for himself in life's adventure.

Thirteen people made this memorable journey from Spencer County, Indiana to Macon County, Illinois. The group and the ages of the members follow:

Thomas Lincoln, 54; his wife, Sarah Johnston Lincoln, 41.

Abraham Lincoln, 21; and John D. Johnston, 14.

Dennis Hanks, 31; his wife, Elizabeth Johnston Hanks, 23; and four children all under 9; Sarah Jane, Nancy Ann, Harriet A., and John Talbott.

John Hall, age not known; his wife, Matilda Johnston Hall, 19; and son, John, under 3.

The precise place where the Lincolns crossed the Wabash River has been a question of long dispute. One group was quite certain the crossing was made at a point opposite Russellville, Illinois, while other authorities were confident that Vincennes was the point where the Wabash was crossed. This uncertainty caused much controversy as to the wisdom of memorializing a spot which could not be definitely established.

It is a strange coincidence, indeed, that just on the eve of dedication of this memorial there should be discovered a document of unquestionable authenticity which seems to settle for-

ever this long dispute and allow the sponsors of the memorial to dedicate the monument without fear of having blundered as to location.

Mr. William W. Keifer of Springfield, Ohio, in looking over some old papers left by his father, J. Warren Keifer, came across a letter written by his father's cousin, Peter Smith, on July 17, 1860. Smith lived at Petty's Post Office, Lawrence County, Illinois.

This original letter, through the courtesy of Mr. Keifer, is now among the rare manuscripts of the Lincoln National Life Foundation. It not only confirms the place of crossing but also substantiates one of the most famous of the human interest events in Lincoln's life which, incidentally occurred just after the family entered Illinois. The letter in part follows:

"Petty's P. O., Lawrence Co.  
"Ill. July 17th, 1860

"J. Warren Keifer, Esq.,  
"Springfield  
"Ohio

"Dear Cousin:

"It is so long since I received a letter from you that I am anxious to hear from you. I have been very closely engaged since my return and have given but little time to the land business or to my social correspondence. I have since the first of April fenced in 200 acres of my prairie and have broken and put in corn about 100 acres—the corn looks very fine and if the season should continue as favorable as it has been thus far I will have an immense crop. I never saw corn look better.

"I attended our State Convention on the 9th May at which we nominated our State officers—there were about 600 delegates and I can truly say I never in life saw congregated together so many noble intelligent looking men. But "Honest Old Abe" was there a head and shoulders above the rest, the noblest Roman of them all—the observed of all observers—simple and unaffected in manners—sociable and easy of access to the humblest of his fellow Citizens. I had the honor of an introduction to Lincoln by my friend J. K. Dubois auditor of State who is from our County. Lincoln gave me a very cordial greeting and entered into conversation as an old friend and acquaintance. After conversing a while said I to him, 'Lincoln there is a rumor in circulation in our region about you and I want you to tell me all

about it.' 'Well,' said he, 'what it is?' 'About 30 years ago rumor says Abram Lincoln was seen walking barefoot driving an ox team with an ox waggon moving a family through our town of Lawrenceville—it that true?' 'In part,' says Lincoln. 'About 30 years ago I did drive my father's ox waggon and team moving my father's family through your town of Lawrenceville and I was afoot but not barefoot. In my young days I frequently went barefooted but on that occasion I had on a substantial pair of shoes—it was a cold day in March and I never went barefooted in cold weather. I will remember that trip thro' your County as long as I live. I crossed the Wabash at Vincennes and the river being high the road on the low prairie was covered with water a half mile at a stretch and the water covered with ice—the only means by which I could keep the road was by observing the stakes on each side placed as guides when the water is over the road. When I came to the water I put a favorite fist (fice) dog I had along into the wagon and got in myself and whipped up my oxen and started into the water to pick my way across as well as I could—after breaking the ice and wading about ¼ of a mile my little dog jumped out of the waggon and the ice being thin he broke through and was struggling for life. I could not bear to lose my dog and I jumped out of the waggon and waded waist deep in the ice and water, got hold of him and helped him out and saved him.'

"Lincoln is a man of the people who by patient toil and perseverance from the humblest walks of life is now to be considered second to no man in our great Republic. His nomination is greeted with enthusiastic shouts and joyful demonstrations by all the friends of freedom over our prairie state. We have good reasons to believe that Egypt will be redeemed. Lincoln will get a vastly increased vote over the vote given to Fremont. As an example our County of Lawrence gave Fremont 80 votes only out of a vote of 1500. At our next fall election we expect to cast about 2000 and from the reports of a recent investigation lately made we expect to carry the County for Lincoln—this is over a thousand per cent gain. Many other counties boast of larger gains than ours—in some counties in Egypt there were but 2 or 3 Republican votes given in '56 and they now expect to carry the counties for Lincoln. . . .

"Yours truly,  
"Peter Smith"