

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN'S DIVERSIFIED OCCUPATIONS

Abraham Lincoln at twenty-eight years of age came to the urgent realization that he had no plans for the future. He had drifted about from one temporary occupation to another until he finally reached the decision that some definite resolution with respect to his future must be made.

In the process of contemplating about different kinds of work that he might attempt, he came to this proposition stated in his own words: "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."

Abraham Lincoln here faced the most important crisis in his personal experience up to that time. He was confronted with the question of whether or not to follow the course of least resistance and train his hands, or to attempt the more difficult task of training his intellect. He could have become a successful blacksmith after a short apprenticeship, but to become a successful disciple of Blackstone would challenge all the energy he possessed. It should ever be credited to the wisdom of Lincoln that he chose the more difficult way.

We have been able to find in Lincoln's own writing his testimony with reference to the different occupations in which he was engaged, and these have been supplemented by brief statements about his achievements in the various tasks which he undertook.

FARMER

"I was raised to farm work which I continued until I was twenty-two."

Lincoln's agricultural background is revealed in his remarkable address at the Wisconsin State Fair in 1859 when he discussed current problems of the farmer and advocated the need of power-driven plows.

RAILSPLITTER

"Abraham, though very young, was large for his age (8 years) and had an ax put in his hand at once, and from that until his twenty-third year he was almost constantly handling that most useful instrument."

Railsplitting was Lincoln's most widely known occupation, although it was but one phase of his wider experience as a woodsman. His task of clearing fields of the heavy timber and building cabins found its climax in his superintendence of cutting the timber and of building a flatboat strong enough for a trip to New Orleans. Lincoln's father was an excellent cabinet-maker.

FLATBOATMAN

"When he was nineteen, still residing in Indiana, he made his first flatboat trip to New Orleans."

Lincoln was but sixteen years of age when he first went to work on the Ohio River as a ferryman. His familiarity with river transportation led to his first New Orleans trip. In 1831, after reaching Illinois, he was again employed to pilot a flatboat to New Orleans, and his first political announcement was a discussion on navigation of western rivers.

CLERK

"He (Lincoln) contracted with him (Offutt) to act as clerk for him, upon his return from New Orleans, in charge of a store and mill at New Salem."

At a trading post operated by Taylor on Anderson River at Gentry's store, both in Indiana, Lincoln had served as clerk, but he is more often associated with the New Salem experience where he first worked for Offutt and later set up in business for himself.

SOLDIER

"Abraham joined a volunteer company and to his own surprise was elected captain of it. He went to the campaign and served three months."

The military experience of Captain Lincoln was rather limited, but he did enlist in the Black Hawk War service on two subsequent occasions after his first period of enlistment ran out, and his election to the captaincy gave him much pleasure. His experience as a soldier finally culminated in his occupying the position of Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of the Republic by virtue of his office as President.

POSTMASTER

"He was appointed postmaster at New Salem—the office being too insignificant to make his politics an objection."

The appointment of Abraham Lincoln as postmaster of New Salem in 1833 was Lincoln's first political honor, although it was made by one of different political faith. He served three years in this capacity, and thus received the rare opportunity of reading the current news which sifted through his hands in the form of newspapers and periodicals.

SURVEYOR

"The surveyor of Sangamon offered to depute to Abraham that portion of his work which was within this part of the county."

The appointment of deputy surveyor, which was offered to Abraham Lincoln, was made contingent upon his preparing himself to fill the office. This called for a general knowledge of mathematics. He soon presented his credentials and was put to work. He became a recognized authority in this field of information.

LAWYER

"In a private conversation he (John T. Stuart) encouraged Lincoln to study law—In the autumn of 1836 he obtained a law license, and on April 15, 1837, removed to Springfield."

The occupation which Lincoln finally chose to follow as his life work caused him to pursue a course of reading law until he finally arrived at the very head of his profession in the state of Illinois. Lincoln's career as a lawyer sets him apart as one of the outstanding practitioners at the bar in his day.

STATESMAN

"The election of 1834 came, he was elected to the legislature—He was re-elected in 1836, 1838, and 1840."

"In 1846, he was elected to the lower house of Congress and served one term only."

"In compliance with a custom as old as the government itself, I appear before you to address you briefly, and to take in your presence the oath prescribed by the constitution of the United States to be taken by the President 'before he enters on the execution of his office.'"

A political career which began in 1834 by his election to the House of Representatives of Illinois was followed by three more terms in the same body. Ultimately he became a member of the United States Congress and finally he was elected to the Presidency.

We have observed the humble occupations which engaged Abraham Lincoln's attention as a youth. We have seen him come to the day of decision and choose the more difficult way which prepared him for the Presidency. His understanding of the masses which has caused him to be called "Great Heart" was made possible by his having been associated with so many humble people in his diversified occupations.