

LINCOLN LORE

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BIRTHPLACE FARM TITLE

This year marks the one hundred and thirtieth anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth. Nearly eighty years have now passed since the place of his nativity has been given more or less attention, and for nearly a quarter of a century the birthplace farm of the President has been a national shrine.

It was not until last month, however, that the United States government obtained documentary evidence that the farm on which the enshrined cabin now stands was actually in the possession at one time of Abraham Lincoln's father.

When the editor of Lincoln Lore first went to Hodgenville, Kentucky, to reside twenty years ago, he discovered to his amazement that the site of the Lincoln National Park was determined entirely by testimonies of old citizens whose affidavits were nothing more than a collection of folklore and tradition. The fact that Abraham Lincoln himself could not point to the precise location of his cabin birthplace contributed to the confusion.

The affidavits by old citizens of Larue County were matched by other testimonies duly authorized by people living elsewhere, which affirmed that in fourteen other cabins in as many different communities the nativity of Abraham Lincoln occurred.

Here is a list of the rival birthplaces as compiled by the editor:

- Jonathan's Creek, Swain County, N. C.
- Ocona Lufta, Swain County, N. C.
- Caravan, Enroute to Kentucky.
- Lynn Mountain, Tennessee.
- Beech Fork, Washington County, Ky.
- Stone House, Bourbon County, Ky.
- Cabin, Thatcher's Mill, Bourbon County, Ky.
- Talbott Place, Hardin County, Ky.
- "Pop" Martin Place, Hardin County, Ky.
- Lincoln Cabin, Elizabethtown, Ky.
- Race Street, Elizabethtown, Ky.
- Mill Creek, Hardin County, Ky.
- Mouth of South Fork, Larue County, Ky.
- Knob Creek, Larue County, Ky.
- Plum Orchard, Buffalo, Larue County, Ky.

When the Abraham Lincoln Farm Association in 1916 deeded the 110½ acres of land and the Lincoln cabin and improvements to the government, there was no legal land document accompanying the papers to prove that Abraham Lincoln's father was ever in possession of the farm. One spokesman for the association plainly stated that Lincoln's father was a squatter on the land and never held possession of any specified boundaries.

The uncertainty of the location of the birthplace of Lincoln and the lack of documentary data to establish beyond a doubt the actual site of the nativity encouraged the editor of Lincoln Lore to search the public record for evidence relating to Thomas Lincoln's land holdings. When he emerged from this long period of research covering nearly ten years, he had discovered many original records which gave to the Lincoln National Park a documentary rather than a traditional background.

At the time the government acquired the Lincoln farm one newspaper stated that the property had changed hands only twice since Abraham Lincoln was born there. The fact is that the tract on which the birthplace cabin stood had changed hands eighteen times during the interval between Thomas Lincoln's residence and acquisition by the United States of America.

It was not until the Lincoln farm was recently placed under the jurisdiction of the Historic Sites Department of the National Park Service that there seemed to be any inclination to give to this important shrine a historic setting. It is through the efforts of the Historic Sites Department that the government is now in possession of photographic copies of valuable records relating to the Kentucky land holdings of Thomas Lincoln and especially to the boundaries of the birthplace farm.

It was a pleasure indeed for the editor of Lincoln Lore to spend a whole week in the month of June assisting a representative of the National Park Service to make over four hundred micro films of early land grants, deeds of conveyance, papers in law suits and other public records which deal directly with the Lincoln Farm in Kentucky. Although many of these records had been discovered by the editor more than twenty years ago and many of them had passed through one serious fire they were found in an excellent state of preservation notwithstanding the fact that some of the documents were written one hundred and fifty years ago.

The original land grant of sixty thousand acres within which the Lincoln farm was situated was photographed along with the first transfer of the half of the property made on June 15, 1786. The large boundary was then divided into two smaller tracts of fifteen thousand acres each, and after passing through several hands, further divisions were made until an eight thousand acre tract was acquired by Richard Mather.

Richard Mather sold a three hundred acre tract to David Vance and two endorsements on the article of agreement indicate the acquisition of this property first by Isaac Bush and then by Thomas Lincoln. The endorsements are as follows:

(1) For value received I assign the within agreement to Isaac Bush given under my hand and seal this 2nd day of Nov. 1805. Test. Ben Helm, John Miller, David Vance.

(2) For value received I assign the within article to Thomas Lincoln witness my hand and seal the 12th day of December 1808.
Test. Sam Haycraft

Isaac Bush

While Thomas Lincoln was in possession, the land was thrown into litigation over the validity of the title, and the two hundred dollars cash which Thomas Lincoln paid for the farm as the court records disclose was probably a clear loss to him. The farm continued in litigation after it passed out of Thomas Lincoln's hands and was finally cut up into several smaller tracts.

The recording of these original records relating to the Lincoln farm is a major historical achievement in Lincolniana and will now make it possible for the United States government to trace the title of the Lincoln farm back to the original patentee.