

LINCOLN LORE

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A RIVERSIDE LINCOLN MEMORIAL

A new memorial park has been dedicated to Abraham Lincoln on the banks of the Ohio River at a point where Anderson Creek empties into the larger stream. This creek forms the dividing line between Perry and Spencer County, Indiana. The memorial project is one-half mile west of Troy, and becomes Indiana's forty-sixth roadside park area. It contains three acres.

It is especially appropriate that the Anderson Creek community be called to the attention of Lincoln students by this new memorial, and it may well serve as a monument to many extremely interesting episodes which occurred within its environs.

Near this point tradition claims that Thomas Lincoln landed his unruly flatboat on the river trip to Indiana in 1816. It was here that the Lincoln family, migrating to Indiana the same year, crossed the Ohio River on Hugh Thompson's ferry. Here Abraham Lincoln, apparently for the first time, left his father's house to go out to work for a monthly wage. Here he is said to have received his first dollar for services rendered in conveying travelers to a passing steamer. Here, we are told, he had his first experience in litigation. Here, too, he looked out upon civilization which was passing in dramatic pageantry up and down the Ohio.

The Lincoln Ferry Park, as it is called, will be primarily a memorial to the river experiences of the Lincolns. The pioneers of the Mississippi Valley were river-minded people and depended almost exclusively upon the navigable streams to get their goods to the market. New Orleans was the magnetic center of the entire area and the question of most public interest in the western country was the navigation of the rivers.

The floods which now cause so much destruction along the Ohio River were in early days mediums of helpfulness. Thousands of flatboats laden with produce for New Orleans could not leave their moorings on small streams until the high waters came and swept them out, as they did in the colder months of the year. The rising of the waters in the streams was called a "fresh" and, when the flatboats departed, it was said they had "gone out with the fresh."

Flatboat Landing

Thomas Lincoln, father of the President, very early in life was initiated into the fascinating method of conveying goods to market by flatboat. One of the closest friends of his youth, Peter Sibert, Jr., became a famous river pilot, and doubtless Thomas accompanied him on many exciting expeditions during those early years in Washington County, Kentucky.

The first trip on record which Thomas Lincoln made was to New Orleans in 1806. How many other times he may have made this trip we do not know. Although there is no authoritative evidence that he conveyed his household goods from Hardin County to the mouth of Anderson Creek in 1816 before bringing his family overland, there does seem to be a favorably accepted tradition to this effect.

Childhood Glimpses

Abraham Lincoln was but seven years old when he first passed through the Anderson Creek community. There can be but little doubt that the Lincolns crossed the river on Hugh Thompson's Ferry which was then being operated across the Ohio River, touching the Indiana side at Anderson Creek.

The city of Troy close by the ferry was probably the trading point of the Lincolns for the first few years in Indiana, so Abraham, as a small boy, in coming from his home must have passed often through what is now the park area. Troy was a very important shipping point in those early days. At this point the Ohio River makes an abrupt turn, and for more than twenty-five miles it follows a northwesterly course, then makes a sharp turn to

the southwest. The geographical advantage of this town in early river days made it the most thriving city south of Louisville on the Indiana side of the river.

Ferryboy

A man living in Troy by the name of James Taylor owned some land at the mouth of Anderson Creek and operated a ferry there. He was also a dealer in livestock and had built a large packing-house from which he shipped his salted beef and pork down the river on flatboats. It was here that Abraham found work in 1825, when he was but sixteen years of age. He was not only expected to help in the packing-house but to operate the ferry.

The Husking-bee

James Taylor had a son by the name of Green B. Taylor who helped him with the business at the packing-house, and after the elder Taylor's death Green became the proprietor of the enterprise.

Green, who was about the age of Abraham, is said on one occasion to have thrown an ear of corn at Abe which cut a gash over his eye. Just what caused Green to be provoked is not certain, but one story has it that the difficulty arose at a husking-bee when Abe found a red ear and kissed Green's girl.

The First Dollar

One reputable Lincoln author claims that early in the spring of 1827 Lincoln again came back to the Anderson Creek community for the purpose of building a scow or light flatboat in order to make a trip down the river. When he had his craft completed, he is said to have been asked by two travelers to aid them in boarding a river steamer in mid-stream by the use of his boat. According to the story, Lincoln told Secretary Seward and other members of the Cabinet that, after the two men had been set aboard the steamer, each paid him a half-dollar for his labor, and this was the first money he had ever earned for himself, his wages for his work at the ferry going to his father.

Afoul of the Law

A sequel to the earning of the first dollar is often told which seems to have some documentary support, although there are not now available the original records on which the story is based. Lincoln is said to have used his small boat at Bates' Landing just below Anderson Creek on many occasions to convey passengers to passing steamboats, and suit was brought against him by the Dill brothers who had the ferry rights at that point which gave them the exclusive privilege to set people across the Ohio River.

Lincoln is said to have defended himself in Squire Pate's court by declaring he had never set any one across the river but had only conveyed his passengers to a steamer in midstream. Some authors have contended that it was Squire Pate's decision in his favor which first caused him to take an interest in the study of law.

The First Romance

The late Dr. Barton was very sure that Lincoln's first romance could be traced to those days on the Ohio River. When Abraham was in the process of the ferry litigation on the Kentucky side of the river, he met the niece of Squire Pate, Caroline Meeker, and immediately fell in love with her. Her people, however, objected to his attentions and he finally withdrew them.

It is to be regretted that Lincoln has not left some document which would allow us to confirm some of the very interesting episodes which are said to have taken place in the several months during which he worked on the river near the mouth of Anderson Creek.

The new Lincoln Ferry Park would be a major project indeed if all the episodes associated with Lincoln's brief sojourn there could be verified.