

LINCOLN LORE

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Ā' brā hām Līn' kūn

One hundred and thirty-nine years ago today an infant born in a log cabin near the present town of Hodgenville, Kentucky, was named Abraham Lincoln. As it is usually the mother who selects her child's given name, so, if it be true that the female of the species chooses her mate, does she determine the surname as well.

Although this name, Abraham Lincoln, has become one of the traditional "household words," it is often mispronounced by those who admire the man most. Lincoln himself had much difficulty in getting his given name properly spelled, and many biographers still insist that his surname was originally Linkhorn.

It cannot be said that there is but one exact, correct pronunciation for the name of this illustrious man, but most authorities feel it should be pronounced as follows: Abraham—the first "a" is like "a" in *labor*, the second like "a" in *arm*, and the third like that in *am*, the emphasis being on the first syllable. Lincoln—(lin kūn) the "i" is like "i" in *cabin* and the "u" is like "u" in *under*.

When the Pilgrims arrived in America motivated by a sincere desire to improve their spiritual environments, they dedicated their new homes to God. While they often named their New England communities after the hamlets where they had lived in old England, they absolutely refused to name their children after the English Kings and Queens.

Samuel and Martha Lincoln of Hingham, Massachusetts, named their sons Samuel, Daniel, Mordecai, and Thomas. No sons of theirs were to be called after Charles, George, Richard, or Henry. When Mordecai and Sarah named their boys, they called them Mordecai, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was here that the name of Abraham Lincoln was introduced into the family. Abraham, son of Mordecai, had been named for his grandfather, Abraham Jones. Thereafter "Abraham" seemed to be a favorite name in the family of the Lincolns, and it was one of the key names which assisted greatly in eventually tracing the lineage of President Lincoln.

Nearly every generation of Lincolns had its Abraham, and usually an Isaac and a Jacob. In 1782 one of these Abrahams moved to Kentucky where four years later he was massacred by the Indians. In the settlement of his estate his oldest son Mordecai under oath was asked how his father spelled his name, and he replied, "He spelt his name ABRAHAM LINCOLN." It was this name which was passed on to his grandson, President Abraham Lincoln.

It is very likely that the son of Thomas and Nancy Hanks was called "Abe" by his playmates, but there is no indication that he ever referred to himself by this nickname. His first signature, written as early as 1824 when he was but fifteen years of age, is written out in full.

It would appear that when Abraham departed from his father's house at the age of twenty-one, he left his given name behind and thereafter was called "Lincoln." One fact is clearly established, that after he reached Illinois he consistently signed his name "A. Lincoln." Whether or not he dropped the name Abraham because he did not like it or because he had been nicknamed "Abe" which he may have resented, may never be known.

The initial "A" for Abraham in Lincoln's signature presents a strange peculiarity in that two periods are used after it instead of the usual one period. Possibly with his sense of humor Lincoln felt that the name Abraham was such a long one that it deserved two periods.

Shortly after Lincoln was nominated for the Presidency there was much speculation about the spelling of his name, especially his given name. He had occasion to write to George Ashmun about it on June 4, 1860, in these words:

"My dear Sir: It seems as if the question whether my first name is 'Abraham' or 'Abram' will never be settled. It is 'Abraham,' and if the letter of acceptance is not yet in print, you may if you think fit have my signature thereto printed 'Abraham Lincoln.' Exercise your judgment about this."

It is about the original spelling of the surname, however, that there has been a continual debate. It is quite true that it is found in many different forms in the early colonial records, such as Linken, Linkern, Linkon, Linkorn, Lingcum, Lingcorn, and many other variations. Without an exception these incorrect spellings were from the pens of persons not associated with the Lincoln family, usually clerks and other copyists in the offices of the recorders. There is no evidence that any member of Abraham Lincoln's ancestral line ever spelled his name other than LINCOLN. Furthermore it may be said that there is yet to be discovered a Lincoln related to the President who could not write his name, and there were many illiterate men in America during the early years of the nation's existence.

If Lincoln did lament the day that he was blessed with such a name as Abraham, he was not successful in obscuring it with an initial "A" after he became "The Railsplitter" candidate for the Presidency. The homely old Biblical name became a bonanza in the copy of the publicist, and soon the name Lincoln faded out with preference given to the "Abe", or as it was usually displayed, "Old Abe." One enthusiastic correspondent called him during the Presidential campaign, "Old Abe Lick-em", while others called him "Old Abe" in the spirit of derision.

There was an amusing display of his name associated with that of Vice-presidential candidate Hamlin. Some wag had printed this form: abraHAM LIncoln.

Elected to the Presidency, Lincoln was confronted with the necessity of again using his given name in his signature to make his signed documents legal, and all of his state papers were signed Abraham Lincoln, but he still continued to use for his personal correspondence the old A. Lincoln signature.

While the term "Father Abraham" may have been used during the political campaign in the spirit of jest, it was not long after the war was in progress that it became a term of endearment which the soldiers used constantly. The paternal name soon gathered about it a degree of respect and reverence unapproached by any other American name.