

LINCOLN LORE

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THE LINCOLNS AND AUDUBON

One may be reasonably assured that John J. Audubon, the noted American naturalist, was acquainted with Thomas Lincoln, father of the President. It is also probable that Abraham Lincoln himself, when a small boy in the Indiana wilderness, saw the noted American naturalist.

A certain Thomas Lincoln who lived in New England became a companion of the scientist on some of his later explorations. Audubon prepared in 1834 a manuscript entitled *Delineation of American Scenery and Character*. In the last paragraph of the preface he mentions "my young friend Thomas Lincoln of Dennisville in Maine." In several of the short sketches Audubon mentions his "young friend" who was a descendant of Thomas Lincoln "the cooper" of Hingham, Massachusetts, the same town where President Lincoln's first American progenitor resided. The Lincoln Finch, Plate 177 in Audubon's famous drawings of American birds, apparently was named for the ornithologist Thomas Lincoln who first discovered and identified this member of the finch family.

Francis Herrick, our best authority on Audubon's life, states that Audubon and Ferdinand Rozier entered the mercantile business in Louisville, Kentucky, and some of the surrounding towns in 1807. They continued their enterprise into the next year.

According to Samuel Haycraft, pioneer historian of Elizabethtown, Kentucky, Audubon and his business partner Rozier "were merchants in the town at an early date," and James Hackley was their clerk. It is likely that this brief business venture covered a period sometime between the fall of 1807 and the summer of 1808.

It was at Elizabethtown that Thomas Lincoln, the father of the President, likely met Audubon for the first time. Thomas and his wife, Nancy Hanks Lincoln, took up their residence there shortly after their marriage in 1806, and in 1807 their first child was born in the town. The Lincolns would come to know any merchant who carried on business in a town of such limited proportions.

On the side of a business block in Henderson, Kentucky, a bronze tablet has been placed bearing this information: "On this corner stood the general merchandise store of John James Audubon 1810-1820."

The business enterprises of Audubon in Henderson were undertaken with his brother-in-law Thomas W. Bakewell as a partner. On December 22, 1812, two house lots numbered 49 and 50 were purchased from Thomas Towles for six hundred dollars. Between this date and the sale of four lots to Berthuned Nicholas on October 15, 1819, more than twenty-five real estate deals are recorded in the deed books of Henderson County with Audubon as one of the parties mentioned.

It is of interest to know that the Rutledge family, later of New Salem, Illinois, was living in Henderson County at the time Audubon set up his merchandise business there, and Ann Rutledge was born in the county on January 7, 1813.

In the manuscript prepared by Audubon and published by Frances Herrick in 1926, the editor suggests in the closing paragraph of his introduction a parallel between Audubon and Abraham Lincoln. Mr. Herrick failed to stress the point, however, that for four years at least

Audubon lived but forty miles from Abraham Lincoln's playground across the Ohio River in Indiana.

Audubon himself gives a clue to his knowledge of the Indiana Lincoln country in the Herrick volume. In the first chapter of the book Audubon presents a realistic picture of his trip down the Ohio River from Shippingport, Pennsylvania, to Henderson, Kentucky, where he was then making his home. The only place he mentioned in the sketch beside the place of embarkment and the place of destination was "Pigeon Creek, a small stream which runs into the Ohio from the state of Indiana." It was here that Thomas Lincoln and his family, including a son Abraham, made their home. The fact that Pigeon Creek was mentioned by Audubon clearly indicates that he was familiar with the stream, and there is no doubt but that he had explored the surrounding country, perhaps many times during his ten years residence at Henderson.

The community where the Lincolns had settled grew up about a famous deer lick and it was one of the last of the hunting grounds that the Indians reluctantly surrendered. In 1814 a traveler who passed through this country made this written observation: "The forest is full of deer, antelope, bears, wolves, ground-hogs, hares, wildcats, squirrels, snakes, and wild turkeys, the male bird of which often attains a weight of twenty-five pounds, and besides this there are many kinds of birds."

The most desirable of all the Audubon prints is his drawing, "The American Turkey Cock." It recalls an experience which Abraham Lincoln had shortly after reaching Indiana just before the completion of his eighth year. He tells the story in the third person: "A flock of wild turkeys approached the new cabin. Abraham, standing inside the cabin, rifle in hand, shot through a crack and killed one of them." One of Lincoln's companions, mentioning the same rifle, said, "I have killed a hundred deer with it myself and turkeys too numerous to mention."

Audubon was undoubtedly attracted to Pigeon Creek, with which he seemed to be familiar, by the enormous flocks of wild or passenger pigeons there which gave the creek its name. A town some distance north of the Lincoln home was named Huntingburg because of the large number of people who came into that section of the country to hunt the wild pigeon.

Audubon gives a realistic picture of these great flocks of passenger pigeons in the following language: "Multitudes are seen, sometimes in groups at the estimate of 163 flocks in twenty-one minutes. The noontide light is then darkened as by an eclipse and the air filled with the dreamy buzzing of their wings."

One of Audubon's biographers notes, "At Henderson he was accustomed to make long excursions scouring the fields and woods and fording the lakes and rivers; dog, gun, and a tin box containing his pencils and colors were taken along." What a picturesque figure he must have been as he came into a community, and certainly every boy for miles around would know the strange "bird man" at Henderson. It is not presuming too much to conclude that Abraham Lincoln saw this old Elizabethtown acquaintance of his father while the family was living on Pigeon Creek in Indiana.

It would be interesting indeed to know whether or not Audubon mentioned his old friend, Thomas Lincoln of Elizabethtown and Pigeon Creek, to his new friend, the young naturalist Thomas Lincoln, who accompanied him on the Labrador expedition in 1833.