

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN'S HOOSIER BACKGROUND

The presence of a Hoosier on the Presidential ticket in 1940 has called more or less attention to the statesmen Indiana has produced. The most illustrious of all her patriotic men, one to whom she has a rightful claim, is Abraham Lincoln. He was the first Hoosier President.

Lincoln is often referred to as a Kentuckian because of his Kentucky birth, and also as a citizen of Illinois because of his residence there at the time he was elected President. Seldom, however, is Lincoln called a Hoosier, although one quarter of his whole life was spent in Indiana. He lived at one place in the Hoosier state twice as long as he lived in Kentucky, twice as long as he lived in New Salem, Illinois, twice as long as he resided in Washington, and two-thirds as long as he lived in Springfield, Illinois.

When Lincoln visited his old home in Indiana twenty years after he left it, he prepared some verse to express his feelings on observing the vacant house and neglected fields. The last four lines of the original writing are Lincoln's poetic expression of his Hoosier heritage:

The very spot where grew the bread
That formed my bones I see,
How strange old field on thee to tread
And feel I'm part of thee.

In September 1859 Lincoln paid a visit to Indianapolis and was apparently moved to reminiscing when speaking to a group in the state of his early years. An excerpt from the report of his introductory remarks reveals how deeply he was influenced by again returning to Indiana:

"Away back in the fall of 1816, when he was in his eighth year, his father brought him over from the neighboring state of Kentucky, and settled in the State of Indiana, and he grew up to his present enormous height on our own good soil of Indiana. The scenes he passed through today are wonderfully different from the first scenes he witnessed in the State of Indiana, where he was raised, in Spencer County, on the Ohio river. There was an unbroken wilderness there then, and an axe was put in his hand; and with the trees and logs and grubs he fought until he reached his twentieth year."

In the political campaign of 1860 Cassius Clay was making some speeches in Indiana on behalf of Mr. Lincoln. On July 20 the Republican nominee wrote to Mr. Clay about his itinerary and made this comment:

"In passing let me say that at Rockport you will be in the county within which I was brought up from my eighth year, having left Kentucky at that point of my life."

Abraham Lincoln awoke on his fifty-second birthday in the state capital of Indiana. He was on his way to Washington to be inaugurated as the first Hoosier President. The speech Lincoln made on February 12 to the Indiana legislature assembled at Indianapolis makes no mention of his birthday. He made at least three other brief talks in Indiana that day and two outstanding speeches at Cincinnati where in one instance he addressed himself directly to the Kentuckians, but still he made no reference to his birthday. He did receive one present in Indiana, however, which might be called a birthday present. When the train stopped at Greenville, John Doaks gave the President a large red apple.

It was during his last days in the White House, however, where we find a statement by the President which might be called his biography of a dozen words. The abbreviated sketch of his life recognizes the importance of the fourteen formative years of his youth. He said to an Indiana regiment which greeted him at the White House on March 17, 1865: "I was born in Kentucky, raised in Indiana, and reside in Illinois."

When Lincoln said that he was "raised in Indiana," the fact should have been of sufficient interest to invite his-

torians to recreate if possible the environment which so largely determined his course in life. These Indiana years were of far-reaching importance in building a foundation for his patriotism. From the age of seven to twenty-one Lincoln absorbed a sufficient amount of information about the history of the country and its institutions to prompt him, two years after he left the state, to announce as a candidate for the legislature of Illinois.

Lincoln, himself, has helped us very little in forming an opinion of just how far he progressed intellectually during the impressionable years. In fact the two autobiographical sketches he prepared were written at a time when he seemed to be over-emphasizing his humble beginning and his lack of opportunity.

In one sketch Lincoln wrote: "While here (Indiana) Abraham went to A B C schools by littles, kept successively by Andrew Crawford, (James) Swaney, and Azel W. Dorsey. He does not remember any other. The family of Mr. Dorsey now resides in Schuyler County, Illinois. Abraham now thinks that the aggregate of all his schooling did not amount to one year."

Many people have inferred from this statement that the boy went to school but one calendar year. The fact is that in Indiana he went to three schools during part of three different years. A boy or girl who had the aggregate of twelve months' schooling had what would be considered then as a common school education. Including two terms of school in Kentucky, Lincoln received a formal school training not unlike the other youths growing up in the wilderness. The fact that in later years he could master the six books of Euclid is sufficient evidence that his early progress in mathematics at least was thorough and progressive.

In another sketch he made a somewhat fuller statement about his early Indiana school days which has also been given a literal interpretation far beyond its original intent. He wrote in 1860, about the time of his nomination for the Presidency, this humble and depreciative account of his intellectual attainments:

"We reached our new home (Spencer County, Indiana) about the time the State came into the Union. It was a wild region, with many bears and other wild animals still in the woods. There I grew up. There were some schools, so called, but no qualification was ever required of a teacher beyond 'readin', writin', and cipherin'' to the rule of three. If a straggler supposed to understand Latin happened to sojourn in the neighborhood, he was looked upon as a wizard. There was absolutely nothing to excite ambition for education. Of course, when I came of age I did not know much. Still, somehow, I could read, write, and cipher to the rule of three, but that was all. I have not been to school since. The little advance I now have upon this store of education, I have picked up from time to time under the pressure of necessity."

Two references which Lincoln made in this sketch about his intellectual progress should be read together. It will then be revealed what a very humble appraisal he placed on his achievements up to the time he was twenty-one as well as thereafter. He not only claimed "When I became of age I did not know much" but thirty years later, as Presidential nominee, he also said what *little* advance he had made "was picked up under the pressure of necessity."

Lincoln was a well informed young man when he became of age as is evident from his early political speeches, the testimony of his stepmother about his study habits, and a catalogue of the books which he had read. The first Hoosier President did not waste the valuable formative years which counted so much in the remarkable achievements of his adult life.