

LINCOLN LORE

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EARLIEST LINCOLN BIOGRAPHY

Joseph J. Lewis of Westchester, Pennsylvania, might be called the first biographer of Abraham Lincoln. He prepared for the *Chester County Times*, largely from source material furnished by Jesse W. Fell of Bloomington, Illinois, a story of Lincoln's life and achievements which was published on February 11, 1860. It was reprinted in many papers throughout the country as it here appears.

Among the distinguished men who by their patriotism and eloquence have assisted to create and sustain the party of constitutional freedom which now predominates in most of the free States, there is no one who has a firmer hold on the confidence and affections of the people of the Great West, or is more an object of their enthusiastic admiration, than Abraham Lincoln, of Springfield, Illinois. No traveler that visits the valley of the Mississippi, north of the Ohio, can fail to be impressed with the unrivalled popularity of that eminent Republican chief throughout that whole region; and it is impossible to doubt that he will be vigorously pressed upon the Chicago Convention, by the representatives of a large and earnest constituency, as a proper standard bearer of our great national party in the impending struggle for the Presidency.

Abraham Lincoln is a native of Hardin county, Kentucky. He was born on the 12th day of February, 1809. His parents were both born in Virginia, and were certainly not of the first families. His paternal grandfather, Abraham Lincoln, emigrated from Rockingham county, Virginia, to Kentucky, about 1781 or '2, where a year or two later he was killed by Indians, not in battle, but by stealth, while he was laboring to open a farm in the forest. His ancestors, who were respectable members of the Society of Friends, went to Virginia from Berks county, Pennsylvania. Descendants of the same stock still reside in the eastern part of this State.

Mr. Lincoln's father, at the death of his father, was but six years of age, and he grew up literally without education. He removed from Kentucky to what is now Spencer County, Indiana, in 1816. The family reached their new home about the time the State was admitted into the Union. The region in which they settled was rude and wild, and they endured, for some years, the hard experience of a frontier life, in which the struggle with nature for existence and security is to be maintained only by constant vigilance and efforts. Bears, wolves and other wild animals still infested the woods, and young Lincoln acquired more skill in the use of the rifle than knowledge of books. There were institutions here and there known by the flattering denomination of "schools," but no qualification was required of a teacher beyond "readin', writin' and cypherin'," as the vernacular phrase ran, as far as the rule of three. If a straggler supposed to understand Latin happened to sojourn in the neighborhood, he was looked upon as a wizard, and regarded with an awe suited to so mysterious a character.

Hard work and plenty of it was the order of the day, varied, indeed, by an occasional bear hunt, a not unfrequent deer chase, or other wild sport. Of course when young Lincoln came of age he was not a scholar. He could read and write, and had some knowledge of arithmetic, but that was about all; and as yet, he had but little ambition to know more of what was to be found in books. His attainments otherwise were not to be despised. He had grown to be six feet four inches in stature, was active and athletic, could wield the axe, direct the plow, or use the rifle, as well as the best of his compeers, and was fully up to all the mysteries of prairie farming, and fully inured to hardship and toil. Since he arrived at age he has not been to school. Whatever his acquirements are, they have been picked up from time to time as opportunity occurred, or as the pressure of some exigency demanded.

At twenty-one he removed to Illinois and passed the first year in Macon county, in active labor on a farm. Then he got to New Salem, at that time in Sangamon, now in Menard county, where he remained about a year as a sort of clerk in a store. Then came the Black Hawk war. A company of volunteers was raised in New Salem and the surrounding country, and young Lincoln was elected captain—a success which, he has since said, gave him more pleasure than any he has since enjoyed. He served with credit during the campaign, and became popular. On his return in the fall of 1832, he was a candidate for the Legislature, and ran, but was beaten. This is the only time that he has ever failed of an election by the people when he has sought their suffrages. The next and three succeeding biennial elections he was elected to the Legislature, and served with distinguished reputation in that body. While a member of the Legislature he first gave indications of his superior powers as a debater, and he increased, by frequent practice, his natural faculty for public speaking. His latent ambition was excited by success, he improved industriously the opportunities that offered of self-cultivation. From the position of a subaltern in the ranks of the Whig party, a position which was appropriately assigned him by his unaffected modesty and humble pretensions, he soon became recognized and acknowledged as a champion and a leader, and his unvarying courtesy, good nature and genial manners, united with a certain lofty disinterestedness, and general abnegation of self, made him a universal favorite.

During his legislative period he studied law, and removing to Springfield, he opened an office and engaged actively in practice. Business flowed in upon him, and he rose rapidly to distinction in his profession. He displayed remarkable ability as an advocate in jury trials, and many of his law arguments were masterpieces of logical reasoning. There was no refined artificiality in his forensic efforts. They all bore the stamp of masculine common sense; and he had a natural, easy mode of illustration, that made the most abstruse subjects appear plain. His success at the bar, however, did not withdraw his attention from politics. For many years he was the "wheel horse" of the Whig party in Illinois, and was on the electoral ticket in several Presidential campaigns. At such times he canvassed the State with his usual vigor and ability. He was an ardent friend of Henry Clay, and exerted himself powerfully in his behalf in 1844, traversing the entire State of Illinois, and addressing public meetings daily until near the close of the campaign, when becoming convinced that his labors in that field would be unavailing, he crossed over into Indiana, and continued his efforts up to the day of election. The contest of that year in Illinois was mainly on the tariff question. Mr. Lincoln, on the Whig side, and John Calhoun, on the Democratic side, were the heads of the opposing electoral tickets. Calhoun, late of Nebraska, now dead, was then in the full vigor of his really great powers, and was accounted the ablest debater of his party. They stumped the State together, or nearly so, making speeches usually on alternate days at each place, and each addressing large audiences at great length, sometimes four hours together. Mr. Lincoln, in these elaborate speeches, evinced a thorough mastery of the principles of political economy which underlie the tariff question, and presented arguments in favor of the protective policy with a power and conclusiveness rarely equaled, and at the same time in a manner so lucid and familiar and so well interspersed with happy illustrations and apposite anecdotes, as to secure the delighted attention of his auditory.

Mr. Lincoln has been a consistent and earnest tariff man from the first hour of his entering public life. He is such from principle, and from a deeply rooted conviction of the wisdom of a protective policy; and whatever influence he may hereafter exert upon the government will be in favor of that policy.

(Concluded in following Lincoln Lore.)