

# LINCOLN LORE

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## LINCOLN 1809-1839, DAY-BY-DAY ACTIVITIES

Lincoln 1809-1839. By Harry E. Pratt. The Abraham Lincoln Association. Springfield, Illinois, 1941.

The fourth volume in the series of *Lincoln Day By Day* is now off the press, and it is of the same painstaking scholarship which has characterized the other three compilations. Notations on nearly thirty-one years of Lincoln's life, or more than one-half of it, are included in the book which introduces Lincoln on his birthday and follows his career up to the last day of December 1839.

One may now trace the day-by-day activities of Abraham Lincoln in the four volume set from the day of his birth, February 12, 1809, to the day of his inauguration as President of the United States on March 4, 1861. It is to be hoped that The Abraham Lincoln Association will continue this most laudable undertaking by compiling four more publications, one for each year of the Presidency, which will take Lincoln through the Washington period.

The series which really started with volume number four (1854-1861) has been developed by penetrating into the more obscure years of Lincoln's life until in this last work which might properly be called volume one, his natal day is reached.

No Lincoln student who has taken seriously the building of a library of the more important works on Lincoln should be without this day-by-day series. These books should be included among the few publications which one is able to place near his desk to keep within constant reach. A general survey of the present compilation of facts chronologically arranged emphasizes not only the vast amount of historical data already acquired, but also reveals how little has been done with some of the more important periods of Lincoln's life.

While it is not to be expected that the Kentucky and Indiana years of the growing youth will be enriched with very much more information of a documentary character, there is much information especially about the Kentucky years which will be new to many students. It is hoped that

this source of information about Lincoln's parentage and childhood will invite future historians to ignore the worthless and unreliable statements about Lincoln's early environment which Herndon called "a stagnant, putrid pool."

There is no adequate story in print about the fourteen formative years which Lincoln spent in Indiana, and when one reviews the actual source data which are compiled for the years 1816-1830 inclusive, he must conclude that this one quarter of Lincoln's life is the period needing far more research than has been done.

The matter of emphasis is brought home to the reader as he reviews various sections of the book. The large amount of data which has been gathered on Lincoln's three terms in the legislature at Vandalia seems to overshadow all other references to his Illinois experiences up to the time he was thirty years of age.

It is with much interest that one observes Lincoln's emergence from the obscurity of the New Salem community to a seat in the legislature on December 1, 1834. Five years later he occupied a commanding position in his party when the legislature met in the new State Capitol at Springfield for the first time on December 9, 1839.

One incident in the proceedings of the legislature is of more than provincial interest, and it really marks the first milestone in Lincoln's public attitude toward the right and wrong of slavery. On Friday March 3 Lincoln and one other member of the legislature protested against certain anti-abolitionist resolutions and affirmed their opinion about the injustice of slavery.

While the Vandalia notations on Lincoln's activities in the legislature are very complete and invaluable, it would be of great interest to know something about the influence of the community itself on Lincoln. Here he undoubtedly attended festive occasions arranged during the session, and he could not have escaped entirely the social life of the town.

One wonders if Vandalia was not a much more important influence in the life of Abraham Lincoln than New Salem. It would appear that a better understanding of Lincoln's intellectual advancement might be acquired by paying more attention to historically prominent people with whom he was associated at Vandalia, instead of placing so much emphasis on a few rather obscure characters who lived in the legendary and folklore atmosphere of New Salem.

The aggregate Lincoln residence at Vandalia was about a year. He resided at New Salem less than four years with the Black Hawk War and Vandalia days deducted. Still further, when he became a surveyor he was away at frequent intervals during the four year period, so that his actual presence in the town of New Salem could not have been much more than three years or three times the actual residence in Vandalia.

The changing of the state capital from Vandalia to Springfield allows the author to close his compilation in a community that is familiar ground to all Lincoln students. Certainly social life in the legislature did not begin with the Springfield period, but on the third day of the first term at Springfield Lincoln wrote a letter inviting a group of young women to enjoy some of the social occasions of Springfield while the legislature was in session.

The concluding pages of the day-by-day citations introduce Lincoln as he begins his legal practice over the eighth judicial circuit. A brief history of the entire period is found in the introduction, and copious notes in the appendix contribute much to a better understanding of Lincoln's activities during this period.

This is a book of beginnings in which we are first introduced to Lincoln as an infant in the Kentucky cabins, and then we observe him making his appearance as a novice in many of the enterprises in which he was to become so proficient.