

LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Number 651

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

September 29, 1941

BRANDS AND MARKS

Another interesting document bearing the signature of Abraham Lincoln has just been discovered in the Macon County, Illinois Archives, by Edwin D. Davis. A few days ago the editor of Lincoln Lore, recalling his own research experiences in Kentucky Court Houses, advised Mr. Davis about the historical value of old estray records. This lead was followed up with the result that another manuscript bearing on the early life of Lincoln in Illinois is available.

Whenever an animal strayed from his owner, and was found, the person taking possession of the stray went before a justice of the peace and a full description of the animal was recorded and advertised. The value of the stock was also estimated by some disinterested party. It was in the capacity of appraisers that Lincoln's and John W. Reed's names appear as signers of the following affirmation:

"We the signers having been called to appraise an Estray Mare Taken up by Jonathen B Brown on Monday the 12 th day of Dec. 1830. Do find horse to be four years old next Spring a bright bay 14 hands high a Small blaze and a stripe in her face, right foot white right fore foot with a white stripe down the hough and white hairs around the edge of the hough no brands perceivable black mane and tail appraised to 30 Dollars. Sworn under hands this 16 th day of December 1830.

"A Lincoln
"John W reed"

It is not known whether or not Lincoln filed a notice of the horse he lost, a year and a half later. The loss of this animal cost Lincoln dearly, because it contributed as much as any other factor to his first and only political defeat at the hands of the people.

Lincoln was a member of a mounted company in the Black Hawk War, when the company was mustered out July 10 at White Water River at a point now in Wisconsin. Planning to start early the following morning for New Salem, he found upon arising that someone had stolen his horse. The necessity of traveling much of the way by foot did not allow him to arrive in New Salem until July 18, only seventeen days before the election. With so little time to campaign and his horse gone, he could have reached but a very few people.

The Macon County document recently discovered was not the only time Lincoln was called upon to place a value on a stray horse. On November 14, 1834, he joined with Samuel Hill in the appraisal at \$30 of a "two-year-old brown filly taken up by Thomas Dowell at his farm near Clary's Grove."

Just five days after this Lincoln had the experience of losing another horse, this loss, however, did not occur until after he had won a place in the Legislature. On a judgment obtained against William Green, his partner in the store enterprise, Lincoln's horse, saddle and bridle were sold on execution November 19, but fortunately bid in by James Short and returned to Lincoln.

The following year on May 29, 1835, Lincoln again served as an appraiser. With James F. Halsey he valued a stray horse taken up by James Estep who lived on Crain Creek. The animal was "a chestnut sorrel horse, seven or eight years old, a star on his forehead with no brands perceivable and appraised to \$35.00."

One year later on March 17, 1836, Lincoln had occasion to enter a notice for the recovery of his own horse which had strayed away while he was visiting in Springfield, but still living in New Salem. He was there

serving as a witness in the trespass case of William G. Green vs. John Purkapile, and two days after he lost his horse, he bought his first property in Springfield, two house lots between Sixth and Seventh streets. The following notice gives us a description of the horse Lincoln probably owned at this time:

Strayed or Stolen

"From a stable in Springfield on Wednesday, 18th inst., a large bay horse, star in his forehead, plainly marked with harness; supposed to be eight years old; had been shod all around, but is believed to have lost some of his shoes, and trots and paces. Any person who will take up said horse and leave information at the Journal Office or with the subscriber at New Salem, shall be liberally paid for their trouble.

"A. Lincoln."

Whether or not this was the horse which James Short had bid in for him two years before we do not know, but it was eight years old. The fact that it was plainly marked with harness, might indicate it was a new purchase, unless Lincoln was working the horse in helping to break prairie land. It is not likely Lincoln was using a wheeled vehicle as early as this and would not have his horse so marked.

Abraham Lincoln's father, Thomas Lincoln, took up a stray horse in Kentucky in 1811, when Abraham Lincoln was but two years old. This estray notice in the old Hardin County, Kentucky record book is one of the most important Kentucky documents on the history of the Lincoln family, as it definitely establishes the residence of Thomas Lincoln at Knob Creek home as early as the month of May 1811. Up to the time of the discovery of the record, every biographer, without an exception, placed the Lincoln residence at the birthplace farm as four years, but according to the important document which follows, it could not have been more than two:

"11th of May 1811 Taken up by Thomas Lincoln in Hardin County on knob Creek on the road leading from Bairdstown to Nolin a A Gray mare 8 years old 14 hands high Branded on the near thigh but not legible a scar on her off side with a dark spot on her neck on the offside under the main about the size of a dollar a sore Back trots Natural appraised to \$20"

Often-times in Kentucky the negro slaves were obliged to register physical defects which might be used for identification. In the county court book at Elizabethtown, Kentucky, Monday, June 23, 1806 this entry appears:

"George a negro slave of Samuel Givens came into court and proved by Edward Rawlings that he, the nigger, in a fight had part of his left ear bitten off which was ordered to be entered on record."

Something of the atmosphere and terminology of the descriptions in the old estray books found expression in an appraisal which Lincoln made of himself and he must have chuckled when he wrote down the final notation about marks and brands. He prepared an autobiographical sketch for Jesse Fell in 1859 and concluded with this paragraph:

"If any personal description of me is thought desirable, it may be said I am, in height, six feet four inches, nearly; lean in flesh, weighing on an average one hundred and eighty pounds, dark complexion with coarse black hair and grey eyes. No other marks or brands recollected."