

LINCOLN LORE

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PIGEON CREEK CHURCH

In placing special emphasis upon the 125th Anniversary of Indiana's Statehood which occurs on December 11, of this week, and in calling special attention to another anniversary, the coming of the Lincolns to Indiana about the same time the State came into the Union, one is apt to overlook still a third anniversary which is of special significance in attempting to study the religious background of Abraham Lincoln.

It was 125 years ago in the year 1816 on June 8, to be exact, that the Pigeon Creek Baptist Church was constituted in the community where Abraham Lincoln grew to manhood. Inasmuch as the church exerted a major influence in all community life in pioneer days, this institution, with the possible exception of the log cabin school, possibly contributed as much to the intellectual, religious and social development of Lincoln as any other organized group with which he came in contact.

It is evident from the title page of the old Pigeon Church record book which is still extant, that this particular group was associated with what was known as the Regular Baptists. This excerpt is taken from the title page: "Book for the purpose of recording the business of the Church of Christ constituted by the Regular Baptists at Pigeon Creek signed by William Stark." The note of the organization follows: "Saturday, June 8, 1816, the Baptist Church of Jesus Christ known by the name of Pigeon Church, Warrick County, Indiana territory, was constituted by Brother John Weldon and Thomas Downs, presbytery, called for that purpose, whose names, numbers, and articles of faith and government are as follows: First, the Church chooses Samuel Bristow, Moderator, and Thomas Downs, Clerk for the meeting." There were fifteen charter members of the Pigeon Church; Mathew Rogers, John Harrison, Samuel Bristow, John Tenneson, Enoch Harrison, William Lamar, Nelly Rogers, Lavina Bristow, Sarah Powell, Patsy Harrison and Lucy Lamar.

Like many other early religious organizations, the meetings of this group were held in the homes of the people and it was not until March 13, 1819, that some definite action was taken with respect to the building of a house of worship and the selecting of a site for such a building. There was apparently a difference of opinion as to where the church should be built, as might be expected, and any decision was postponed until there was more of a "Oneness of mind concerning the seat." In July of the same

year a committee of five was appointed to view three different places which had been suggested for the church site, or as it was called in the record book, the church seat.

On December 11, 1819, the church confirmed the original recommendation that the meeting house be built at Brother Gordon's. At the January meeting the committee on the building site made a report with reference to the acquisition of the land, and on February 12, 1820, Abraham Lincoln's eleventh birthday, by the way, the first plans for the church building were accepted.

However, it was not until September 9, of the same year, that the church decided to change the plans of the building. On March 10, 1821, a committee of five was appointed with final authority to agree upon a plan as to the form and size of the meeting house. It was decided the meeting house would be "30 by 26 feet, hewed logs, 8 feet in the under story and 6 feet above the joists." The committee was authorized to employ workmen to perform the said work.

By June 12, 1825, the meeting house was in need of repair and three trustees were appointed to attend to the business; Reuben Grigsby, William Barker, and Thomas Lincoln. It was not until June 7, 1823, that Thomas Lincoln was received into the Church by letter. On December 10 of that year three members of the church were appointed to "lay off the burying ground of the Pigeon Meeting House." In July, 1827, the church decided to have a brick chimney on the church and it was agreed that William Barker make the brick.

It is very likely that Thomas Lincoln's hesitancy to affiliate with the Pigeon Church, was because it was of a different faith than the church to which he had belonged in Kentucky. Nevertheless, the Regular or later United Baptist Church, as the Pigeon group called themselves, received Thomas Lincoln's letter from the Kentucky Church, which we have reason to believe was the Little Mount Separate Baptist Church.

On the same day that Thomas Lincoln affiliated by letter Sister Lincoln and Thomas Carter were received by experience. On April 8, 1826, the church records state: "Door opened for reception of members" and the fourth entry bears this inscription: "Received Sister Sally Lincoln by experience of grace." This was undoubtedly Abraham Lincoln's sister, as a church record list shows the name of Sally Lincoln as a member of the church, and then the name Lincoln crossed

out and the name Grigsby written above the name indicating that it was this Sally Lincoln that married Aaron Grigsby. On the same list there also appears the name of Thomas Lincoln and Sally Lincoln, his wife.

One may wonder why Abraham Lincoln did not affiliate with the Church at this time, but it would have been strange if he had joined, and the supposition is that he would not have been invited to join. There were practically no young people on the book of the Pigeon Creek Church. It was a list of adults. Church membership was too serious an affair to be publicly embraced by those who had not settled down in life. The marriage register of Spencer County, and the old church record book, clearly indicated that matrimony was almost a requisite for church membership. Less than four months after Sarah Lincoln, Abraham's sister, affiliated with the Pigeon Church she married Aaron Grigsby. Although it is apparent that Lincoln had plenty of opportunities to marry when he was in Spencer County, if the folklore of the people can be relied upon, the fact that he didn't marry is probably responsible more than any other one thing for his non-affiliation with the church. In other words, it would have been strange, indeed, if he had united with the Pigeon Church.

Thomas Lincoln, the father, became a very prominent member of the Pigeon Church. He was one of its trustees, he was appointed to interview members of the church who had not observed proper discipline, he served as moderator at some of its meetings, and subscribed to funds necessary for repairing and improving the church building.

Just at the close of his residence in Indiana there seemed to be some disagreement between the Grigsbys and the Lincolns, which apparently first found expression at the time of the death of Sarah Lincoln Grigsby. The difficulty between the families was satisfactorily adjusted, however. On February 13 we find the last entry of Thomas Lincoln's name in the church record book when he was appointed on a committee of five, including, H. Gunterman, R. Oskins, D. Turnham, and J. Oskins to decide a matter of church discipline. This, it may be observed, was just a few days before the Lincolns started on their trip to Illinois showing that up to the very last of the Lincoln residence in Indiana Thomas was an active and influential member of the church.

Note: See Lincoln Lore No. 84 for Biographical sketches of ministers who served the church.