

LINCOLN LORE

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THAT NATAL DAY

Every approaching birthday of Abraham Lincoln calls attention to the incidents associated with his nativity. It is not strange that through the years there has accumulated much traditional information relating to the parental home and its environment on that natal day. Folklore has cluttered up the premises to the extent that the actual conditions under which the family was living when their illustrious son was born, has been almost obscured.

Nearly every phase of Lincoln's early life has been in controversy and no question was so hotly contested for several years as the actual location of Lincoln's birthplace. Now an author of a recent book has challenged the accuracy of 1809 as the year of Lincoln's birth, but any one today who questions either the place of Lincoln's birth or the date of his birth, is likely so blinded by the spirit of provincialism or prejudice that it would do little good to display before him documents or duly authorized records as place or time exhibits. The fact that Abraham Lincoln was born on February 12, 1809, near the Cave Spring, three miles south of where the town of Hodgenville, Kentucky, now stands, is no longer in dispute.

There are some other traditions relating to the natal day, reviewed year by year as historical facts, which are positive barriers to a better understanding of the child's infancy.

The Omens

One author in telling the story of Lincoln's nativity has placed special emphasis upon a severe blizzard which he claims was raging in the Lincoln country on the very day when Abraham was born. The impression one gets from reading the story is that nature was disturbed by the birth of this infant who is said to have come "on the wings of the storm." Research has disclosed that there was no such storm on February 12, 1809, as the author alleged and that there were no other unusual phenomena in either the terrestrial or the celestial spheres on the day of Lincoln's birth.

The Hovel

It is not enough to have Abraham Lincoln born in a log cabin, but tradition is supposed to have discovered that his first home was a pile of logs or sticks little better than a hovel and no better than a stable. One of the early biographers of the President used a picture of an old tumbled down shanty situated on an alley in Elizabethtown, Kentucky, as the birthplace of the President. Even now this picture is often displayed as the place where Lincoln was born. The presence of any old dilapidated, unoccupied log cabin in the section of Kentucky where the President first saw the light of day would usually be associated with the birthplace of Lincoln.

The Mutilated Cabin

No one who visits the birthplace of Abraham Lincoln near Hodgenville, Kentucky, gets a true picture of the home in which Abraham Lincoln was born by viewing the restored cabin now exhibited there. While the logs may have been in the original Lincoln home, inasmuch as the size of the rebuilt cabin was cut down in both width and length in order that it might fit into the building constructed to receive it, there is a feeling that the Lincoln home was far inferior to the other cabin homes in the community. The actual Lincoln log cabin in which Abraham Lincoln was born was a typical log cabin for that day and time.

Son of a Freeholder

Not until very recent years has there been made available positive evidence that the cabin in which Abraham Lincoln was born stood on land owned by his father. Early stories about the nativity claimed that Thomas Lincoln was a squatter and did not own the land on which his cabin was built. Thomas Lincoln paid \$200.00 in cash in November, 1808, for a farm consisting of 340 acres, however, less than 100 acres of this tract comprises what is now pointed out to the visitor as the original birthplace farm.

Naming the Baby

Early biographers claim that the President was named for a fifteen-year-old boy who happened to be passing the Lincoln cabin at the time of the infant's birth and was sent to bring a midwife to the home. The story as originally told, is but another piece of folklore, as it is well known that the baby was named for his grandfather, Abraham Lincoln, who was massacred in the month of May, 1786. There has been and still is an attempt to link some one of four different Abraham Enlows, name of boy in question, with the destiny of Abraham Lincoln.

Big Sister

No picture of the Lincoln cabin home in Kentucky at the time of Abraham Lincoln's birth can be correctly visualized without observing the presence of another child but two years old, a girl named Sarah, the first child of Thomas and Nancy Lincoln. Her presence implies that the coming of Abraham Lincoln, the first boy, must have brought much pleasure to the parents as well as the little sister. We are also to conclude that there might not be lacking such infant clothes as would be necessary for the occasion, and most certainly there would not be the same measure of anxiety in the mind of the mother as had been experienced two years before, when Sarah was born at Elizabethtown.

Traditional First Visitor

Dennis Hanks constantly claimed that he was the first person outside the immediate family who saw the baby Abraham Lincoln, but Dennis Hanks was hopelessly confused about the nativity of Abraham Lincoln and was never just certain where Abraham Lincoln was born until advised by some of the Hanks relatives. In Dennis' interview with Herndon he claimed Abe was born on Knob Creek which was about eight miles from his own home, yet he ran all the way over to the cabin to see the newborn babe. There were many babies related to Dennis born in the community where he lived and it is foolish to presume that fifty-six years after the birth of Abraham had occurred that he, a nine-year-old boy at the time, would remember any details whatever about that particular baby.

The Nativity Cartoon

Probably there has never been a version of the nativity of Abraham Lincoln which draws a more correct picture of the natal day on February 12, 1809, than that famous cartoon which shows some of Thomas Lincoln's neighbors inquiring of one another about any news that there might be in the community, when one man offers the information that there was a new baby out at Tom Lincoln's. The comment brought forth the statement that "Nothing ever happens here," and it is not likely that anyone, not even those in the Lincoln cabin home, changed to any great extent, the routine of their usual pioneer life. Probably Abraham Lincoln's own parents on that natal day in 1809 thought of their own offspring as just another addition to the family.