

# LINCOLN LORE

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## A LOG MEETING HOUSE AND A DEERSKIN RECORD BOOK

Although the Christmas spirit is fundamentally religious, the social and economic emphasis has had a tendency to steal much of the human interest approach to this festive season. The sounding of a religious note in this issue of *Lincoln Lore* should appeal to the reader at Yule time. Notwithstanding the aspersions cast on the parents of Lincoln and the attempt to remove the growing boy from any worthy environment, the fact still stands, thoroughly documented, that Abraham Lincoln spent the formative years of his life under the influence of pious and active members of the church. His father and his own mother, his stepmother and his sister, were all closely associated with the organized religious bodies in the community where Abraham Lincoln was growing to manhood.

The recent acquisition in southern Indiana of an old log meeting house, and a church record book bound in deerskin, may serve as a sufficient incentive to call attention to the primitive religious surroundings which contributed to the forming of Abraham Lincoln's character.

By legislative enactment the Old Goshen Church situated in Harrison County, Indiana, twelve miles south of Corydon, the Indiana state capitol, has just become one of the state's memorials. The act of setting it aside provides for the maintenance of the church building under the direction of the State Conservation Commission.

While this church is not directly associated with the Lincolns, it is a typical pioneer church of the Lincoln period, and it closely resembles the church in which the Lincolns worshiped. Moses and Squire Boone, who were related to the Lincolns through marriages, between the Boones and Lincolns in Pennsylvania, deeded the two and one-half acres of land on which the church building stands, and also the graveyard, to the trustees of the church. This church was also in the same county where Thomas Lincoln's brother, Josiah, lived. He was likely an occasional attendant at the church.

The church in the wildwood that Abraham Lincoln remembered, and which he attended with the other members of the family for a decade, was known as "The Little Pigeon Church," located in Spencer County, Indiana. It was here that the pioneers sang their Christmas carols and it is also in the graveyard of this church that Abraham's sister lies buried, and not far away in an earlier community cemetery lies the body of his mother.

A record book of this old Pigeon Church, carrying on the roll the names of Thomas Lincoln, Sarah Bush Lincoln and Sarah Lincoln Grigsby, has recently changed hands and now passes from the trustees of the church to Hilbert Bennett, a member of the Spencer County Historical Society. This change of possession should assure the permanent preservation of the old book, which is probably the most valuable record book relating to the Indiana history of the Lincoln family.

The doctrines of what was called the Hard-Shell Baptist Church were clearly set forth in the front of the record book, and they must have been very familiar to Lincoln and definitely influenced his religious thoughts, some positively and others negatively.

Possibly the church ordinance that made the deepest impression on Abraham Lincoln was the primitive service of foot washing. An order on the record book for May 8 1819, states:

"The church agrees to designate or set apart one of their communion seasons to be administered in the evening after which they proceed to washing of feet." This comment comes from one who observed the practice of

this primitive ordinance. "It is a beautiful service—the brethren together washing one another's feet, and the sisters to themselves likewise engaged. Those who are able to speak from experience testify to the spiritual helpfulness." Is it not likely that this humblest of all ordinances observed by the church may have left a lasting impression on the plastic mind of a boy who became one of the humblest men who ever lived?

It is difficult to find a more important source book in attempting to account for some of the early contributions to Lincoln's religious and moral precepts, than the old record book bound in deer hide, in which the doctrines of the religious body are clearly set forth. However, a book of more mercenary value, connected with the old church, may some day come to light.

A little known Lincoln story appeared in a letter printed in the *Kansas City Journal*, for January 22, 1909, contributed by Caleb A. Obenshain, pastor of the Memorial Baptist Church, at Dewey, Oklahoma. This is Rev. Obenshain's story:

"I have knowledge of an incident which I have never seen in print. In the year 1866, while a teacher in Rockport Academy, in the southern part of Indiana, I was invited by the Methodist presiding elder, the Rev. J. J. Stallard, of the Rockport district, Indiana Conference, to attend and assist him in conducting a quarterly meeting to be held in Gentryville, Indiana. The meeting was near where Mr. Lincoln's mother lies buried. We visited the grave of Mr. Lincoln's mother and were taken to the cabin where the Lincoln family had lived. We then visited an old log church standing probably a quarter of a mile distance from either the cabin or the grave, an old log Baptist church, not then in use, but where my guide told me the Lincoln family had formerly worshiped.

"While in the old church I climbed up into the loft to familiarize myself with the building and discovered in a crevice between two of the upper logs an old faded memorandum book that had been used in other years. Opening it and scanning its contents I found this entry, where the church was charged 'Dr. To. 1 broom, ½ doz. tallow candles,' and signed, 'Abe Lincoln, Sexton.' To me it was an interesting discovery, but I did not then realize the value of that little entry in Lincoln's own handwriting, as I have realized it since. So after noting it carefully, I placed the book, yellow with age, back in the crevice where I had found it."

More important, however, than the doctrines of the church, spread in the old record book, or the messages of the ministers, was the Christian example of Lincoln's own father. Everyone who knew him has spoken kindly of him and only those who had no personal acquaintance with him have condemned him. He served in many capacities in the Pigeon Creek Church as the records reveal. He was appointed a trustee of the church, was on its original building committee, moderator at the church meetings, selected to interview members about discipline, etc. There is sufficient evidence in the old record book to prove conclusively that he was an earnest and faithful member of the congregation during all the years that Abraham Lincoln was approaching maturity.

One who often sat at the table in the Lincoln cabin home in Indiana has testified that Thomas Lincoln habitually asked grace at meal time, and these were the words he always used, "Fit and prepare us for life's humblest service, for Christ's sake, Amen." The child Lincoln was not unfamiliar with the Bethlehem story, nor deprived of the spiritual atmosphere accentuated with each succeeding Christmas.