

# LINCOLN LORE

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## BLACKSTONE OR BLACKSMITH?

Lincoln lived long before the day when vocational guidance became a question for educational supervisors to worry about. The father of the family usually took the problem of his children's future in his own hands by binding them out as apprentices to various tradesmen. While the inclinations of a child might have been given some consideration usually the demand for certain arts, as many of the trades were called, determined what occupation might be followed to the best advantage. Very often, however, a child was encouraged to follow the trade of his father, usually an art that had become a sort of family inheritance.

Very little attention has been paid to a statement made by Abraham Lincoln about his choice of a vocation. When he returned from the Black Hawk war in 1832 he states in an autobiographical sketch prepared in the third person "He was now without means and out of business but was anxious to remain with his friends who had treated him with so much generosity, especially as he had no where else to go. He studied what he should do—thought of becoming a blacksmith—thought of trying to study law, and decided he could not succeed at that without a better education."

At twenty-three years of age Lincoln was trying to decide whether it would be Blackstone or Blacksmith with the probabilities in favor of blacksmithing as he did not qualify his ability to succeed in that profession. It would not have been strange if he had become a village smithy as it was the trade in which we find his earlier forebears engaged—the family heritage. There are many documents available which reveal the business interests of the colonial Lincolns in Massachusetts, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Mordicai Lincoln, son of Samuel Lincoln, first American progenitor of the President, married into the Abraham Jones family and apparently became interested in the iron industry through his wife's people. He established his iron works on Bound Brook near Cohasset, Massachusetts. His supply of ore came from Pembroke and to supplement his smelter already in operation he built a forge with a trip hammer. This was probably the beginning of the Lincoln interest in the iron industry in America.

The son of Mordicai Lincoln named for his father Mordicai Junior, migrated to New Jersey and set up a forge on Richard Saltar's land. Later he married Saltar's daughter. The site of the old Lincoln forge is still pointed out to tourists who visit the Lincoln country in New Jersey.

By the year 1723 Mordicai Jr. had arrived in Coventry, Chester County, Pa., and there on February 28 of that year with a partner, Samuel Nutt entered into an agreement with a Philadelphia merchant, William Branson, to establish an iron works. Mordicai signed the document as "Ironmonger" indicating his vocation. Six hundred acres of land was acquired by the company and they built a "forge with engines." Later on he sold his interest in the company for 500 pounds and thereafter gave his attention to farming.

Possibly it may have been the environment at Baldwin's Blacksmith Shop near Gentry's Store in Indiana which prompted Lincoln to consider blacksmithing as his chosen vocation. Very little is known about Lincoln's association with the blacksmith Baldwin who according to Dennis Hanks was Abe's "particular friend." A blacksmith shop was an interesting place for a boy to play because of the active and interesting vocation which

the smithy followed. The fact that Baldwin was reputed to be a great story teller would contribute to Lincoln's interest in the trade of the man who told anecdotes.

From the explanatory remarks in the autobiographical sketch introductory to his statement about thinking of blacksmithing for a living, he expresses his desire to remain at New Salem. He may have had offers from the local smithy to go in business with him. The blacksmith at New Salem at the time Lincoln seriously considered following this vocation was Joshua Miller. Miller's wife was a sister of Jack Kelso often associated with Lincoln. According to Reep, the New Salem historian, Miller was the only blacksmith for many miles around and had a very large patronage. Possibly he had made some advances to Lincoln with respect to learning the trade.

Regardless of whether the urge to consider becoming a blacksmith came from an ancestral heritage, inclinations cultivated by Baldwin, or the immediate opportunity for a job with Miller, every American citizen should be thankful that none of these appeals were strong enough to detract "Abe" from the more difficult task of preparing himself to become a lawyer. It might be in point to suggest that Lincoln was not accidentally switched off from blacksmithing to law by finding an old copy of Blackstone in a barrel. It is another one of those bits of folk lore which would direct Lincoln's career by luck and chance instead of giving him the credit for taking the initiative of selection, which at different intervals enhanced his opportunity of advancement. How he acquired Blackstone is told in Howell's Lincoln biography which Lincoln read and corrected. He left this statement standing as quoted: "He (Lincoln) bought an old copy of Blackstone, one day, at auction, in Springfield, and on his return to New Salem, attacked the work with characteristic energy."

There is no doubt but what Lincoln could have made a successful blacksmith and his great strength would allow him to do two men's work. The fact that he considered blacksmithing as a trade should dismiss forever the old tradition that he was lazy. On the assumption that Lincoln once said that "his father taught him to work but not to love it" there has grown up a rather widespread conclusion that he shunned physical labor. A man would not contemplate becoming a blacksmith if there were any lazy bones in his body.

### Dr. Warren's Annual Itinerary

The eighteenth annual speaking itinerary of the editor of Lincoln Lore for the 1946 Lincoln season has been arranged for the Eastern coast. The various cities where he will make his headquarters follow and his local engagements may be ascertained by calling the office of the Lincoln National Life Insurance Company in the cities mentioned. Possibly there may be some hours in which he has not already been booked that he might be available for groups desiring to have a Lincoln speaker. There is no obligation whatever attached to an appearance of Dr. Warren. The schedule:

Boston, Mass., January 27, 28, 29; Providence, R. I., January 30, 31; Worcester, Mass., February 1; Hartford, Conn., February 4, 5, 6; Newark, N. J., February 7, 8, 9; Washington, D. C., February 10, 11, 12; Philadelphia, Pa., February 13, 14, 15; Lancaster, Pa., February 18; Allentown, Pa., February 19; Pittston, Pa., February 20; Pittsburgh, Pa., February 21, 22, 25; Warren, Ohio, February 26; Akron, Ohio, February 27, 28.