

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN HOMES ON THE BROADWAYS OF THE WILDERNESS

There has been an almost universal conception that Abraham Lincoln was a backwoodsman brought up in the sticks and never coming in contact with civilization until he arrived in Washington for his inauguration as President. While it is true that his people were settlers and composed the vanguard of pioneers in the west, most fortunately they were not at any time very far removed from the great Broadways of the Wilderness.

If one cared to begin with the first Lincolns who came to America in 1637, they would be found at Hingham not far from Plymouth Rock or Boston. In New Jersey they were in Monmouth County and in Pennsylvania in Lancaster and Berks Counties in the heart of the iron industry. Following them into Virginia it was in the Shenandoah Valley where they settled and at no time during the Colonial Period were they out of touch with the moving population pushing westward toward the frontiers.

When Lincoln's grandfather migrated with his family to Kentucky he followed the great Wilderness Road which was the main trail to that land of opportunity from Virginia and the Carolinas. He established his first home not far from this trail and but a few miles from Louisville the settlement which was soon to become and still remains the commonwealth's first city. When the widow Lincoln upon the death of her pioneer husband moved to the Beech Fork community in Washington County, she located her cabin home on this same main highway leading from Central Kentucky to Louisville and here Thomas Lincoln, her youngest son, father of the President, grew up.

At the time Thomas Lincoln married Nancy Hanks he was living in Elizabethtown, the county seat of Harding County where he had made his residence for seven years. He had spent a year or so on the large plantation of his Uncle Isaac in Tennessee and made at least one trip and probably many more to New Orleans. The first child of Thomas and Nancy Hanks was born in Elizabethtown where the father owned a cabin and two house lots upon which he was paying taxes.

The cabin in which Abraham Lincoln was born in Hardin County was not in an out-of-the-way place back somewhere in the hills of Kentucky but stood within a few feet of the main road of travel between Louisville and Nashville, the most important north and south road in that section of the country. The immediate location of the cabin was at a famous roadside spring where passing caravans stopped to refresh their horses. A town named Burlington was mapped out and lots sold almost adjacent to the Lincoln farm.

When Abraham Lincoln was but two years old the Lincoln family moved to the Knob Creek Home. This cabin residence was also situated but a few feet back from this same Louisville and Nashville Highway, a few miles from the birthplace, near one of the oldest settlements in Kentucky. The Lincolns were living here during the War of 1812 and traditions are extant about the extensive traffic on this road. It is said the first appropriation for a road made by the U. S. Government in the west was made for a piece of highway that passed by Thomas Lincoln's house, and on which highway he was an overseer. Certainly the early years of Abraham Lincoln in

Kentucky were not spent in the backwoods but on the very road side of the busy way to the Cumberland.

When the Lincolns pushed farther west into Indiana, it is true that they moved some distance back from the Ohio River but it was not long before Abraham Lincoln with his ax found his way down to this mighty artery of navigation where steamboats were already beginning to make the entire stream a passageway for thousands of all kinds of crafts. We are told that for some months as a youth Lincoln ax in hand was at work in the forests along the Ohio cutting and piling up wood on the River bank to be sold to the captains of the wood burning steamboats who purchased their fuel as they plied up and down the stream.

Later, Lincoln as a youth of not more than sixteen years of age, secured a steady job at Taylor's Mill ferrying passengers across the mouth of Anderson River where it flowed into the Ohio. Less than a mile from where he worked there was the thriving city of Troy, the largest city during the pioneer days in Indiana situated on the Ohio River west of Louisville. Later Lincoln's scene of activity was changed to Rockport, county seat of Spencer County, where he helped to build a flatboat and from which town he made his first trip to New Orleans. This trip was then as important, educationally, to Lincoln as a tour abroad would be today.

The next move of the Lincolns as they migrated still farther to the west found them located for about a year in an obscure community but in a few months Abraham was again on his way for a second trip to New Orleans. Returning to Illinois he was off to the Black Hawk War. While his home for the next four or five years was at New Salem, as a member of the Illinois Legislature he was spending much of his time, not in this obscure community but in the State Capital. From 1837 until he went to Washington as president, he resided on one of the main streets in the Illinois State Capital at Springfield, with the exception of two years which he spent in the nation's capital at Washington.

While living at Springfield he travelled the Eighth Judicial Circuit which brought him periodically to all of the centers of population in that immediate part of the country. Eventually his fame as a lawyer often called for his presence in Chicago, Cincinnati and St. Louis. His political interests took him to Milwaukee, New York, Philadelphia, Boston, New Haven, Providence, Worcester and many other municipalities.

"Old Abe Lincoln came out of the wilderness" was one of the popular songs used during the 1860 political campaign but in reality the Presidential candidate thus referred to had been around considerable. It would be a difficult task indeed to account for Abraham Lincoln if he and his forebears had lived out of touch with civilization like so many of his mountain contemporaries of Kentucky and Virginia with whom he is often erroneously associated.

The Lincolns were indeed fortunate as they pushed out into the western country to be living on or near such great arteries of travel as the Wilderness Road, the Louisville, the Nashville Trail and the Ohio River—*Broadways of the Wilderness.*