

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN'S PATERNAL GRANDPARENTS, KENTUCKY PIONEERS

The paternal grandparents of Abraham Lincoln and the great grandfather of R. C. Ballard Thurston, who recently passed away at Louisville, Kentucky, were pioneer contemporaries in Jefferson County, Kentucky, and both were killed by the Indians within two years of each other. The decease of Mr. Thurston and the fact that so many of the events associated with Lincoln's paternal grandparents happened in the month of May invites the review of a few pioneer Lincoln episodes at this time.

Mr. Thurston for many years was president of the Filson Club and for a long period an outstanding patron of Kentucky history. His pioneer kinsman, Bland W. Ballard, might be called the earliest recorder of an historical episode connected with the Lincoln family in Kentucky. His observation was submitted to Col. R. T. Durrett and preserved in the colonel's papers now in the Durrett Collection at Chicago University Library. The item in question referred to a massacre which took place at Hughes' Station a few miles east of Louisville and under a crude pencil sketch of the station or fort is this notation:

"Bland W. Ballard states that the station was erected by Morgan Hughes in 1780; that it stood on Long Run in Jefferson County not far from the Baptist Meeting House; that it consisted of eight cabins and four block houses at the corners and that it was a weak fort poorly built. In 1786 a man was killed here by an Indian, while he was coming to the station from his land on Long Run, where he had been putting in a crop. His family resided in the station and soon after his death the widow and children moved to Washington County."

A footnote has been appended to this notation in the handwriting of Col. Durrett and apparently made at a much later date than the body of the document: "Query, might not this man thus killed have been Abraham Lincoln, the grandfather of the President?"

Several duly authorized public records have been discovered which contribute to the support of Col. Durrett's supposition that the man killed on Long Run at Hughes' Station was the grandfather of the President.

It is a well known fact that Lincoln's paternal grandfather, for whom he was named, entered a four hundred acre tract of land near Hughes' Station in Kentucky on March 4, 1780. He migrated to Kentucky about 1782 and on May 17, 1785, William May, surveyor of Jefferson County, surveyed this tract, which he identified as situated on "the Fork of Floyd's Fork now called Long Run." Abraham Lincoln, the pioneer, himself served as "marker" for the surveyor and his second son, Josiah, and his cousin, Hananiah, are named as "chain carriers." This entry in the surveyor's office at Louisville clearly identifies Lincoln with the tract of land on Long Run adjacent to Hughes' Station, one year before the massacre in the same fatal month of May.

Mordecai Lincoln, oldest son of the pioneer Lincoln, set forth in a bill against John Reed's heirs that, "Abraham Lincoln departed this life in May, 1786, without will," which forever establishes the date of the pioneer's death.

When Abraham Lincoln, the Whig Congressman from Illinois, was in Washington, he corresponded with relatives about his ancestry; he commented on his grandfather having been killed by the Indians in Kentucky. Later he wrote to another relative about the massacre in these words:

"The story of his (grandfather Abraham Lincoln) death by the Indians, and of Uncle Mordecai, then fourteen years old, killing one of the Indians, is the legend more strongly than all others imprinted upon my mind and memory."

The massacre was also mentioned in the autobiographical selections for campaign purposes in which Mr. Lincoln emphasized the grandfather "was killed by Indians, not in battle but by stealth when he was laboring to open a farm in the forest." The President usually placed the death of his grandfather "about the year 1784" but as we have observed from the testimony of Mordecai, who shot the Indian, it was in the month of May, 1786.

Some weeks after the massacre of Lincoln's grandfather, which apparently aroused the pioneers because of the sad fate of the widow with five small children and other community casualties, George Rogers Clark, another kinsman of Mr. Thurston, was encouraged to plan an expedition against the Wabash Indians. A subscription was circulated in the Floyd Fork community on which appear, among others, both the names of the Widow Lincoln and Bland Ballard, great grandfather of Rogers Clark Thurston Ballard.

The proposal on the subscription list is as follows: "We, the undersigned subscribers, being fully sworn to appraise the following articles for the use of the expedition against the Wabash Indians, commanded by General Clark for Capt. George Pomeroy's Company. September the 8th, 1786."

Then follows 36 items and among them:

"A gun, the property of Widow Lincoln—8. 0. 0."

"A pack saddle, the property of Bland Ballard—0. 9. 0."

One of the most recent unpublished discoveries by the editor of Lincoln Lore relating to Lincoln's grandparents is a manuscript which proves that the Widow Lincoln soon removed her family to Washington County as the Bland W. Ballard statement indicates. The agreement signed by Jeremiah York also proves the widow had taken active steps to set about supporting her family of five children. The covenant and its endorsements which appear in the papers of the suit brought by the widow against York for "Covenant Broken" follows.

Lincoln vs. York Land Covenant Broken

Feb. 1, 1788.

I promise or cause to be done for Barshe (usually spelled Bersheba) Lincoln the clearing of two acres of land smack smothe for four pounds the work is to be done this spring and six acres to be cleared for the plow for six pounds.

Test

Jeremiah York

James Cullough

Suit brought against him for covenant broken and recovery of 20 pounds asked.

Endorsement

May 20, 1788

Not executed by order of Plaintiff.

Thomas Bridges
August, 1788

We are now able to move back the arrival of widow Bersheba Lincoln and her five orphan children in Washington County, Kentucky, as early as February 1, 1788. This is eight months before the appraisal of the pioneer's estate was ordered on October 14, 1788. The document and its endorsement is of further interest in that it reveals the Widow Lincoln did not press her charges against York, which might imply at least that he had made some further agreement to carry out his contract.