

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN'S LOT IN LINCOLN, ILLINOIS

One day many years ago a young man visiting the library of the Foundation upon being shown an original Lincoln document bearing the name Primm exclaimed, "Why, that man was my great-grandfather." A copy of this document follows:

Charles Cantrall
Emily Cantrall, his wife. } Trespass on the case
vs } Damage \$1000—
John Primm }

The clerk of the Sangamon Circuit Court will issue a summons in the above entitled cause.

Lincoln & Herndon, p.f.

August Term Circuit
Sangamon County Ill 1849

The significance of the name Primm in the Lincoln story did not register with the editor of Lincoln Lore until a recent visit to the city of Lincoln, Illinois. Among the many places of historic interest in the county seat of Logan County is a town lot which was once owned by Abraham Lincoln. This piece of ground, on which a building has been erected, was at one time in possession of a man named James Primm, apparently a relative of the above named John Primm.

James Primm was the first clerk of Logan County. He was elected recorder in 1843 and became the Postmaster at Postville. He speculated in land and one of his acquisitions was a house lot in Lincoln which he purchased from Thomas Clark, who had acquired it at the original sale of lots in 1853. The piece of property was known as "Lot number three in block nineteen." It is situated on the south side of the Court House square.

James Primm's land transactions did not turn out as well as anticipated and he found it necessary to negotiate a loan on his many properties, and went to New York for this purpose. While there he became in need of some ready money and found that former Gov. Matteson of Illinois was in the city and solicited him for a loan of \$400. Abraham Lincoln also happened to be in New York at the time and Mr. Matteson suggested that if Mr. Primm could get Mr. Lincoln to go his security he would make the loan. Lincoln signed the note. It is interesting to observe that Mr. Joel Matteson had recently finished building a home said to have cost \$100,000 and he was reputed to have been worth a million at this time.

When the note became due, Primm could not meet the payment of \$400 due the millionaire Matteson. Mr. Lincoln, Mr. Primm's security, took up the note and made the payment necessary. A check which Lincoln drew in favor of Matteson on Aug. 28, 1857 may have been on the Primm note. On March 11, 1858, Primm deeded to Lincoln lot number three in the city of Lincoln to compensate Mr. Lincoln in part at least for his loss.

The payment of the taxes on the lot which amounted to \$2.40 in 1858 reveals one of the most interesting side-lights on Lincoln's easygoing attitude with respect to money matters. The incident was told to Judge Lawrence B. Stringer by Lewis Rosenthal, a personal friend of Mr. Lincoln and the collector of taxes. Mr. Lincoln had come to Rosenthal's office, from which the lot in question could be seen. Lincoln addressed Mr. Rosenthal: "Say, Rosenthal," said he, "isn't that my lot over there?" I told him that "I guessed it was." "Well who put that shed up there?" inquired Mr. Lincoln. "Well," I replied, "a fellow in town here, who had some extra horses, and wanted some temporary stable room, put up that shed,

but the fellow is a good friend of yours.' 'That's all right,' said Mr. Lincoln, 'but that fellow, whoever he is, ought to pay my taxes. He is getting all the benefit out of the lot and I get none.' 'Well,' I replied, 'I know that fellow, Mr. Lincoln, and he won't pay a cent.' 'Well, who is he anyway,' said Mr. Lincoln. 'If you must know, Mr. Lincoln,' I replied, 'I'm the fellow.' Lincoln looked at me a second or two, and with a twinkle in his eye, said, 'Hand over the receipt. I guess I'm in for it.'

After Lincoln became President, William G. Starkey apparently paid the \$2.00 tax on the lot and he received the following letter from John Hay:

Executive Mansion
Washington, June 8, 1861.

My Dear Sir

The President directs me to acknowledge the receipt of your favor of the 26th May, containing the Collectors receipt for his last year's tax, and to thank you for your kind thoughtfulness in the matter.

He sends you enclosed to pay for money expended interest etc., \$2.00.

Have the honor to be
Your Obt Servant
John Hay

Wm. G. Starkey Esq.

When Lincoln was assassinated at Washington in 1865, he was still in possession of the lot and it became the property of his heirs. Mary Lincoln in 1874 deeded her interest in the tract to her son Robert, who in turn sold it to David H. Harts.

A word about the naming of the town Lincoln might be timely just here, as there have been some strange stories told about how it came by its illustrious name. It is said to be the only town named for Abraham Lincoln before he became President of the United States. When Lincoln was elected to the Illinois legislature his constituents included people residing in the northeast part of Sangamon County. As chairman of the committee on counties which reported "an act to establish the counties of Menard, Logan and Dane" out of Sangamon, Lincoln virtually became the sponsor for the organization of Logan County. The act was approved on February 15, 1839.

Abraham Lincoln also served as attorney for Logan County in its legal difficulties, and was the personal lawyer for the men who were attempting to establish the new town, anticipating it would become the county seat. The proprietors, Latham, Gillett and Hickox retained Lincoln to draw up the contracts for the land on which the town was to be situated. It was Abraham Lincoln also who prepared the bill for submission to the legislature for the removal of the county seat to the contemplated town site.

It is claimed that the name of the proposed town was left blank in the transcript until it was finally urged by the proprietors that it be named for their legal advisor, Mr. Lincoln, and it was duly entered in the official papers.