

LINCOLN LORE

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MEMORIAL DAY MEDITATIONS

Memorial Day has come to mean much more than a season for decorating the graves of military men. This festival makes available an opportunity to show our esteem for our kindred and benefactors. While veneration for those who fought for country has given the day a patriotic atmosphere, fully as impressive are the profusion of flowers which tenderly arranged symbolize reverence for family ties now broken and friendships interrupted.

There has been a general impression that Lincoln was not interested in his family history. This conclusion has come from a purely traditional statement he is said to have made about not knowing who his grandfather was but being "much more concerned to know what his (grandfather's) grandson would be." But Lincoln nevertheless was interested in the history of his grandfather. He wrote a letter to one of his relatives stating: "I am the grandson of your uncle Abraham; and the story of his death by the Indians, and of Uncle Mordecai killing one of the Indians is the legend more strongly than all others impressed upon my mind and memory. I am the son of grandfather's youngest son, Thomas."

It was during this season of beautiful flowers, now symbolized by Memorial Day, that Lincoln received an interesting gift, and an accompanying letter, dated June 10, 1864, from the ladies of the New Jersey department of the Great Central Fair at Philadelphia. The letter has been preserved in the Lincoln papers at Washington and follows verbatim:

"Loyal ladies of Trenton, many of whom are descendants of those matrons and maidens who scattered flowers in the path of Washington when passing through the triumphal arch which his sons had erected in 1789 in the memorable spot where by the blessing of Providence that repulse was given to Cornwallis which reversed the gloomy fortunes of the war for our national independence, now have the pleasure to present for your acceptance a cane made from the same arch, as a humble but heartfelt testimonial of that love and confidence which they in common with millions of their countrymen and countrywomen feel toward you.

"Approaching as you do so near the character and experiences, the trials and responsibilities of the venerated father of our country, most especially in unswerving fidelity to free principles and the discharge of all the duties with which you have been invested by a confiding people, we trust that you may find in the staff now presented you as an 'heirloom' of the old arch where the gratulation song was sung by the patriotic young ladies of Trenton, similar gratification as that which was felt by Washington."

Lincoln upon receiving this cane and testimonial must have recalled his own visit to Trenton on his way to the inauguration in 1861 when he addressed both houses of the legislature. In his opening remarks he stated that as a boy he read Weems' Life of Washington and in commenting on the Revolutionary contests stated: "None fixed themselves upon my imagination so deeply as the struggle here at Trenton, New Jersey."

One version of his remarks at Trenton in which he mentioned the Revolutionary Heroes, records him as saying: "Am I not addressing the sons of these noble sires?" He did not know that before him were some of his own

kinsmen, descendants of his own forbears who had lived in Monmouth County. In fact just two years previous to Lincoln's Trenton visit Edwin Saltar had served as speaker of the New Jersey assembly. Both Edwin Saltar and Abraham Lincoln were descendants of a common New Jersey ancestor, Richard Saltar, whose daughter, Hannah Saltar having married Mordecai Lincoln, was the President's great great grandmother. Furthermore, Hannah Saltar's mother was Sarah Bowne, daughter of Captain John Bowne and Lydia Holmes. Would not Abraham Lincoln have been thrilled at Trenton to have known that one of his own ancestors, Capt. John Bowne, had presided over the provincial legislature 175 years before he was invited to address the New Jersey assembly. The Lydia Holmes who married Capt. Bowne was a daughter of Obadiah Holmes, one of the twelve Monmouth patentees who with his son-in-law wove into the instrument the famous liberty statement. Possibly the fact that Obidiah Holmes in 1851 was beaten with thirty stripes at Boston Common for refusal to abide by the edicts of the established church, may have had something to do with the New Jersey liberty clause issued fifteen years later.

Abraham Lincoln's connection with the Saltar, Bowne, and Holmes families of New Jersey did not become generally known until about the time the New Jersey legislature celebrated its Bicentennial Anniversary in 1883. The chief manuscript for the assembly was written by this same Edwin Saltar mentioned above. He stated that Lincoln's forbears lived in Monmouth County but confined his remarks to the paternal line. If he knew it he did not admit that Lincoln and he were both descendants from a common ancestor, Richard Saltar.

We wonder also, in this reminiscent Memorial Day mood, what the "Loyal ladies of Trenton" would have said if they had known that Lincoln himself was related to the New Jersey "matrons and maidens" referred to so eloquently as having "scattered flowers in the path of Washington." What would their reaction have been if they had been informed that Lincoln's own kinsmen had been among "the sons" who had erected the triumphal arch in 1789.

When the ladies of Trenton graciously complimented Lincoln on "approaching as you do so near the character and experiences, the trials and responsibilities of the venerated father of the country, most especially in unswerving fidelity to free principles," how much more significant the climax of this tribute would have been if Lincoln had known that it was his own ancestors, Capt. John Bowne, and Obadiah Holmes, with their associates, who in the famous Monmouth Patent of 1665, declared, "Free liberty of conscience without any molestation or disturbance whatsoever in the way of their worship," thereby sounding one of the earliest declarations of freedom.

New Jersey should be justly proud of the contribution the state may have made to Abraham Lincoln through his illustrious forbears. Possibly Memorial Day offers a proper atmosphere to meditate on these venerable New Jersey ancestors. Of course their graves will be properly decorated on May 30. We trust some one will not forget to put a few flowers on the grave of little three year old Deborah Lincoln, daughter of Mordecai Lincoln, and Hannah Saltar, who lies buried at Corvell Hill in historic old Monmouth County.