

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN'S PRIMARY EDUCATION

Today when so much emphasis is being placed on higher education and graduate universities, with the college days being extended into the adult years, any comments which might be made with respect to Abraham Lincoln's primary education would seem unimportant. In fact little or no effort appears to be directed towards encouraging an earlier start for American school children in the program of formal instruction. All attention seems to be directed to the post graduate period.

The parents of Abraham Lincoln were school minded. They lived in Elizabethtown, Kentucky during the first two years of their married life. There was a two story academy building there which often presented exhibitions of the children's progress. The birth of their daughter, Sarah, at Elizabethtown would give them a vital interest in education. Duff Green was one of the early instructors at the academy. The opening lies of a published speech sound an important note in one of the fundamental concepts back of early education. He said, "It must be the most pleasing of all considerations to the parent, to be enabled to assist the minds of the rising family to pursue virtue through the paths of literature."

Five years ago this fall the director of the Foundation in company with a member of the editorial staff of *Look* magazine, a photographer and a Lincoln impersonator traveled over the trails of Abraham Lincoln's childhood and youth in Kentucky and Indiana. Among the many historical places visited was the site of the school house attended by Abraham as a small boy. With the approach of school days this visit is again brought to mind. Not more than 500 feet from the site where the structure once stood there now stands a frame school building, which serves the same Knob Creek community where the Lincolns lived from 1811 to 1816. The roster of this Athertonville school in 1945 contained the names of many children whose forebears undoubtedly attended school in the log house with Sarah and Abraham Lincoln.

The court records of Hardin County make available an order which allows us not only to locate by duly authorized record the site of this old school house but we also learn there was a building there as early as the year 1800. It may surprise some historians to learn that there was a school house in Hardin county, Kentucky as early as that date but here is a copy of the record found in County Order Book A, page 231.

"Ordered that James Percefull be appointed surveyor (supervisor) of the road from the Rolling Fork to intersect the old road near a school house on Knob Creek and that all the hands allotted Benjamin Johnston do assist said James in opening and keeping said road in repair."

The road from Rolling Fork is easily identified as "intersecting" the highway from Bardstown to Nashville just opposite the school house site. The Lincoln family lived on the highway, two miles south of the

school building. Some day it might be worthwhile to mark this place where Lincoln started his education. Possibly a modern school built on this spot might be the best memorial.

An autobiographical sketch prepared by Lincoln written in the third person for Scripps states: "Before leaving Kentucky, he and his sister were sent, for short periods, to A B C schools, the first kept by Zachariah Riney, and the second by Caleb Hazel. At this time his father resided on Knob Creek, on the road from Bardstown, Kentucky to Nashville, Tennessee, at a point three or three and a half miles south or south west of Atherton's Ferry on the Rolling Fork."

The autobiographical statement is supplemented to some extent at least by a short statement which appears in *Howell's* campaign biography. Lincoln read the book for errors and made some corrections but left standing this statement: "A sister (Sarah) older than himself married and died many years ago. With her he attended school during his early childhood in Kentucky, and acquired the alphabet and other rudiments of education."

We are able to present from the records of Hardin County, a contract between Edmund C. Tabb and eleven subscribers of a subscription school. This agreement was drawn in 1817 just a few weeks after the Lincolns had left the county for Indiana. An excerpt from a copy of the writing follows:

"I the Said Tabb doth agree to Teach Children Reading Writing and arrithmetic (sic) for the Sum of four dollars for each Subscribed Schollar (sic) for the Space of Six months The Teacher is to Have a Comfortable house answerable for the Business the Teacher is to have his boarding with the Schollars further I the Said Tabb Reserve Every Satturday (sic) in Each Week for himself the School to commence N. B (April 15, 1817) and to teach good Rules and Due hours."

It will be observed that the Saturday holiday, in Kentucky at least, originated with the teachers and was set aside for their benefit rather than a pupils play day.

While great stress has been placed on the fact that Lincoln did not have the advantages of a university education it may have been of tremendous importance that he did attend at least two schools for uncertain periods of time taught by at least two different teachers before he had completed his seventh year.

The child psychologists have placed much stress on the rapidity with which a boy or girl acquires knowledge during early childhood. As beginners start off for kindergartens and primary schools this next month may the importance of these early experiences not be overshadowed by the adults' quest for university degrees. Possibly Abraham Lincoln's early school days, which were not neglected, account in a larger way than we have anticipated for the intellectual heights to which he attained.