

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN'S MEMORIES OF PRINCETON, INDIANA

Abraham Lincoln's trip to New Orleans in 1828 and his visits to the nearby towns of Boonville, Rockport and Troy comprise about all we know with reference to his travels as a youth while living in Indiana. However, he did spend one day in Princeton, a county seat town about 40 miles from his home.

Ninety-one years ago on the very day of the month this bulletin is dated Lincoln was in Lafayette, Indiana, on his way to be inaugurated at the nation's capital. When one of the members of the Lafayette welcoming committee, Robert Stockwell, was introduced to the President elect Mr. Lincoln inquired, "Are you a relative of the Stockwells who formerly lived in Princeton, Indiana? When Stockwell answered in the affirmative Mr. Lincoln volunteered this reminiscence, "When I was a boy about fifteen years of age I took some wool to Princeton to be carded. As I entered the village, I was struck with a quaint sign on the corner of the public square. It stood out in bold relief, ROBERT STOCKWELL, MERCHANT. It was the first time in my life that I had seen gold lettering on a sign and hence I was strongly impressed. I have never forgotten it."

Stockwell remarked that he was the same Robert Stockwell who was then a merchant at Princeton but many years ago had changed his place of business to Lafayette.

However retentive Lincoln's memory may have been in recalling the golden lettered sign upon hearing the name Stockwell, down deep in his heart were other memories which featured the Princeton visit—something much more attractive than the gold lettering had been brought to mind by another resident of the town he chanced to meet many years before.

Lincoln on one occasion attended a Whig barbecue at Carmi, Illinois, and on the following day accompanied Edwin B. Webb and his daughter to Mt. Carmel where Miss Webb was to attend school. Mt. Carmel was just across the Indiana state line in Illinois and only about ten miles from Princeton. After Lincoln had made a speech at the Mt. Carmel Whig meeting a man by the name of John M. Lockwood was introduced to Lincoln as a Hoosier from Princeton which drew from Lincoln this comment: "So you're from Princeton?" He pondered a moment and then added, "Well I was in Princeton myself once but it was a good many years ago." Following up these introductory statements, Lincoln reviewed a reminiscence that had smoldered in his memory. Lockwood reports his story in these words:

"A good many years ago when I was a boy I rode there from my home across the country on a flea-bitten gray mare, with a bunch of wool which my mother had sent

along to have carded. There was nothing so remarkable about such a journey in those days and I might in the course of time have forgotten it but for one incident. While waiting for the wool carder I strolled about the village and happened to pass on the street a very beautiful girl—the most bewitching creature it seemed to me I had ever seen. My heart was in a flutter. The truth is, I was so thoroughly captivated by the vision of maidenly beauty that I wanted to stop in Princeton forever, and that it was with only the greatest difficulty that I succeeded in persuading myself to leave the place at all. When I finally overcome my passionate yearning and set out on the long journey homeward it was with the fixed purpose to return." Lockwood inquired, "Did you return to meet the girl?" "No unfortunately I did not," replied Lincoln and continued, "What prevented my return I do not now recall but so deep an impression had the Princeton girl made on me I remember it was several years before her image was effaced from my mind and heart."

Lockwood heard the romantic tale through and then informed Lincoln that he was the young man at the mill who had carded the wool on that eventful day.

Lockwood had also recalled some incidents associated with the story which supplements what Lincoln remembered. Lockwood recalled that because of the very long distance which the gauky youth about his own age had come for the wool carding he put his work ahead of some others when it was customary for each to wait his turn. Lincoln had brought 18 pounds of wool and the charge for carding was three pounds. Lockwood also remembered that after Lincoln had watched the carding process awhile he sauntered up town. Upon his return he mentioned the beautiful girl he had seen and had learned that her name was Julia Evans. He wanted to know more about her. Lockwood said that he told him "She is a niece of my employer, James Evans" and "she is not only the handsomest but one of the best girls in town . . . and admittedly the village belle."

Possibly Lincoln's visit to Princeton was also recalled when he went to Congress in 1847 and found that one of the representatives from Indiana was Elisha Embree of Princeton. Lincoln and Embree became close personal friends and "occupied contiguous seats in the house." The fact that they were both originally from Southern Indiana and both Whigs gave them much in common to talk about. Later on in 1849 when Lincoln was seeking the general land office appointment for Illinois, he asked his friend Embree in a letter written on May 25, 1849, to write President Taylor in his behalf.

Among the many interesting journeys which Lincoln must have made in those early Hoosier days, next to the New Orleans experience he seems to have best remembered the visit to Princeton.