

# LINCOLN LORE

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## THE TALL KENTUCKIAN

Next week there opens at Louisville, Kentucky, a two act musical drama entitled "The Tall Kentuckian." The author of the play is Barbara Anderson and the score was composed by Norman Dello Joio. It is to be presented at the Iroquois Amphitheatre from June 15 to July 4 during Louisville's Founding Festival which commemorates the 175th anniversary of the state.

The tall Kentuckian, who gives the descriptive title to the play, is six foot, four inch Abraham Lincoln. He was born and lived the first seven years of his life in the state. We doubt, however, if Lincoln's height would be considered phenomenal for a Kentuckian. The *Western Sun* published at Vincennes, Indiana in the issue for June 30, 1827 states that "a dinner was given at Louisville, Kentucky in the month of April to five tall men 6 ft. 8 in., 6 ft. 6½ in., 6 ft. 6 in., 6 ft. 4½ in., and 6 ft. 4 in." It will be observed that Lincoln was the same height as the shortest of the group. The Kentucky all state inter-scholastic basketball team for 1953 is represented by five high school boys who average nearly 6 ft. 4 inches tall.

The setting for much of the action for the drama is "Farmington", the old Speed homestead at Louisville. It is located on the Bardstown road about five miles from the center of the city. Here lived Judge John Speed who had a family of twelve children. One of his sons, Joshua, while living in Springfield, Illinois shared his room with Abraham Lincoln.

All are familiar with the story of Joshua's generosity in inviting Abraham to room with him, but little attention has been given to the personal contributions with which Abraham counterbalanced Joshua's material gifts in establishing this life long friendship. While it is true that in April 1837 Lincoln was without ready money, yet, he had been received as a partner in the most lucrative law practice in the city with an impressive clientele already on its books. He had also been serving in the Illinois legislature as the Whig floor leader and was more responsible than any one else, in the successful passage of a bill moving the state capitol to Springfield. Furthermore, he was twenty-eight years of age and Joshua's senior by nearly six years. Certainly Lincoln's bright professional outlook, his political prestige and his seniority were important factors in establishing these fraternal relations.

Likewise it was a genuine pleasure for Joshua, after he had returned to Farmington, to invite Abraham to visit Kentucky in the summer of 1841. The Illinois guest was still a member of the legislature and the Whig leader of Illinois, having been made the state's elector at large for Harrison. Abraham had also advanced in his profession and was regarded as one of the brilliant young lawyers of the state.

There has been a tendency to exaggerate the length of Abraham's visit with Joshua. An author using the Herndon manuscripts states that Speed, "having sold out his store on the first of January, 1841, he took Mr. Lincoln with him to his home in Kentucky, and kept him there during most of the summer and fall." One of the recent publications featuring the above mentioned play states "Lincoln stayed six weeks at Farmington." A footnote in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* comments that "Lincoln visited Joshua Speed from early August to the middle of September at the

Speed plantation in Jefferson County." This notation would imply a six weeks visit. There is positive evidence that in 1841 Lincoln was in Kentucky less than three weeks. He did not arrive at Louisville earlier than August 18 and departed not later than September 7.

It is very fortunate that the old Speed homestead, Farmington, has been preserved and that the spacious room which Lincoln occupied while there has been restored to its original state. For the first time Lincoln was allowed to enjoy for a short period of time the atmosphere of a home of culture and especially a table where delicacies were served that were unknown in his cabin homes. Some interesting reminiscences are available about Lincoln's reaction to saddle of lamb and mint jelly, peaches and cream, etc. which indicate a new interest in the culinary art.

Apparently the chief subject of conversation between Joshua and Abraham on this visit, however, was romance. We would imply from the correspondence that passed between them after the return to Springfield that their conversation during the brief visit was mostly about their respective love affairs. It was Lincoln's breaking of his engagement with Mary Todd which was indirectly responsible for his visit with Speed, and upon his arrival at Louisville, Abraham found that Joshua was also contemplating matrimony.

The young lady then in the good graces of Joshua was Miss Fanny Henning. Several weeks after Abraham left Farmington he commented about this courtship in these words: "After you and I had once been at her residence, did you not go and take me all the way to Lexington and back, for no other purpose but to see her again?" To another member of the Speed family Lincoln wrote with reference to Miss Henning that he thought her to be "one of the sweetest girls in the world," but he did feel however that she did have "a tendency to melancholy" which was regrettable.

It would be interesting to know whether or not on this visit to Lexington with Joshua, Abraham had the home of Mary Todd pointed out to him. Inasmuch as he had broken his engagement to Mary it is not likely that he would pay the Todd family a visit. We know he did not meet her father until several years later in Springfield. Without a doubt it was Joshua's happy marriage to Miss Fanny Henning that encouraged Abraham Lincoln to again approach Mary Todd on the subject of matrimony.

Not all of Lincoln's time at Louisville was spent in the social whirl. James Speed, a brother of Joshua, in an address on Lincoln which he delivered at Cincinnati, in referring to Lincoln's visit at Farmington said, "I saw him daily; he sat in my office, read my books, and talked with me about his life, his reading, his studies, his aspirations. He made a decided impression on all."

It was on this visit that Lucy G. Speed, mother of James and Joshua, presented Abraham with a copy of an Oxford Bible which twenty years later he acknowledged accompanied by an autographed photograph. The visit of Abraham Lincoln at Farmington was an important episode in his life and is worthy of being memorialized in "The Tall Kentuckian."